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UNKNOWN

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FANTASY FICTION

THE DEVIL WE KNOW . . Henry Kuttner

He was a sufficiently determined man to be willing to sell his soul to a demon—but the thing that bothered him most was the demon's admission that there was no soul. Then—what did the demon want—

EVEN THE ANGELS . . . Malcolm Jameson

Being the files concerning the case of one soul, misdirected to Ghenna by error, and the Heavenly efforts to straighten out his case. He was a soul who never asked for more than his dues —nor could accept less. He didn't—not exactly—

MR. JINX . . . . . Robert Arthur

Mr. Jinx had a nice proposition for sports promoters; he provided accidents to order. Hire him and your fighter won because the opposition sprained a toe—or plain vanished. For that matter, hire him or else!

THE CASE OF *the friendly corpse* . . . L. RON HUBBARD

Jules didn't want to be a necromancer—but he had an overfriendly corpse to deal with—

"I don't care how lucky you are, there's one *CHANCE* you *dare not* take!"

"BEFORE I tell you what it is, let me say this: In twenty years of handling salesmen, it's the No. 1 Jonah. I know. Because I once took the chance myself . . . and lost. Let me give you the picture . . .

"For years we had been trying to get a crack at some of the immense and profitable Apex business—without success . . . couldn't even get in.

"Then one day Fate dumped me down in a coast-to-coast plane in a seat right alongside Apex's president.

"What a break! What an opportunity! And did I muff it? Once on a friendly basis, he actually drank in everything I had to say about our line . . . asked a hundred questions. I thought I had done the best job of quiet, restrained selling of my career. But at Salt Lake City he asked the stewardess to switch him into the seat across the aisle and from there in he was 'icicles.'

"I couldn't understand why then, and I never knew until a chance remark I overheard months afterward revealed what had irritated him. Know what it was? My breath. It killed my chances cold . . . just as it can kill so many other men's chances.

"So I am saying to you men, now, that your breath is one of the things you dare not gamble on as long as you're working for me.

"So here's an order: Before you make your calls, help put your breath on the more agreeable side with Listerine."

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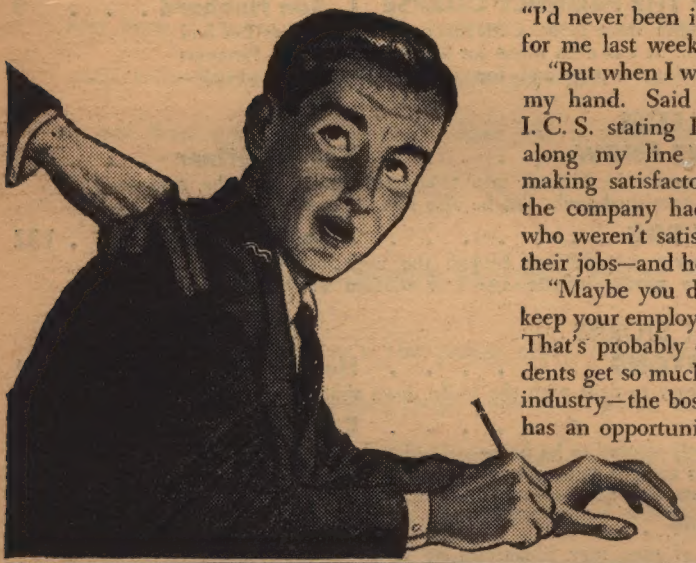

"I'd never been in the boss' office—'til he sent for me last week. Mister, I was scared stiff!

"But when I went in, he stood up and shook my hand. Said he'd had a letter from the I. C. S. stating I had enrolled for a Course along my line of work, and that I was making satisfactory progress. He added that the company had room at the top, for men who weren't satisfied with just 'getting by' on their jobs—and he meant it!

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STREET & SMITH'S

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CONTENTS FOR AUGUST, 1941 VOL. V NO. 2

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NOVEL

THE CASE OF THE FRIENDLY CORPSE L. Ron Hubbard . . . 9

Jules didn't want to be a necromancer—which was too bad for Jules. It was even worse for him that he got his formulas for reviving corpses and for making friends mixed up—

NOVELETTES

THE DEVIL WE KNOW . . . . . Henry Kuttner . . . 90

The demon sold himself into temporary slavery for—he said—one slightly tarnished soul. But he also said there was no soul, so why—

THE GOLDEN EGG . . . . . Theodore Sturgeon . . 132

There were some things beyond the understanding of even the nearly infinite age and wisdom of Elron—

SHORT STORIES

THE ROAD BEYOND . . . . . Norman A. Daniels . . 81

It was easy to drift with the traffic down that strange, gray road—

MR. JINX . . . . . Robert Arthur . . . 107

He merely wanted to be paid—paid fifty thousand dollars —to stay away from sporting events. Reasonable in a way. Accidents will happen—and did when he was around!

ARMAGEDDON . . . . . Fredric Brown . . . 119

A boy of nine may sometimes be forgiven if he shows poor judgment in what he uses to load his water pistol—

TAKE MY DRUM TO ENGLAND— . . Nelson S. Bond . . . 124

A legend of a Drum—the Drum to call the help of a ghostly crew to England in her need.

EVEN THE ANGELS . . . . . Malcolm Jameson . . 151

Being the interdepartmental files and records concerning the case of one soul, not-so-wrongfully consigned, in error, to Gehenna—

READERS' DEPARTMENTS

OF THINGS BEYOND 8

—AND HAVING WRIT— 146

The readers speak their minds.

Illustrations by: Cartier, Kramer, Orban and Schneeman

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All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

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NOTICE TO READERS

THIS WILL BE THE LAST ISSUE OF UNKNOWN in its present form. The next issue, October, 1941, will represent one of the biggest forward steps we have made since Unknown was started in March, 1939. Three major changes will be made at one time, and each one of the three will, in itself, constitute a strong, radical improvement.

FIFTY-FIVE PERCENT MORE TEXT—

At present, Unknown's 160 pages carry about 70,000 words of text. That is the equivalent of a somewhat larger than usual $2.50 book. I've found, incidentally, that friends find it a little hard to realize that a volume as slim as Unknown, with some pages occupied by illustrations, departments and advertisements, can carry as much material as a fattish novel. Since we pay for material by the word, in common with nearly all other magazines, I know very precisely what goes into an issue. They average a little more than 70,000 words. Missourians are cordially invited to count.

The October issue will contain approximately 110,000 words.

—NEW LARGER DIMENSIONS—

Beginning with the October issue, Unknown will be 8¼ by 11 inches—almost exactly the size of a sheet of standard typewriter paper. This size will allow a maximum of eye-ease and hand-ease; the pages open out and—if you are, as are most, a lap-reader—the pages will lie open without clamps to hold them there. The type will run in two wide, easy-reading columns.

—AND A NEW TITLE

It has become more and more evident that the present title, Unknown, bothers the grammatical sense of many readers. "Unknown" may be a self-sufficient title to us, but the word is an adjective and those grammatically inclined search uncomfortably for a noun for it to modify. Also, to the uninitiate, "Unknown" is bothersomely vague in meaning—it implies nothing, suggests no type of material to them.

Beginning with the October issue, the title is to be changed slightly by the addition of the missing noun; in October it will be

UNKNOWN WORLDS

Finally, in view of the fifty-five-percent increase in text matter, Unknown Worlds will be increased in price—by the large sum of one nickel.

The internal make-up of the issue will be modified in some measure by the increase in physical size, and by the increased amount of material. Present plans are to make the lead novel about two-thirds again as long; at 50,000 words Unknown Worlds' lead novel will be very nearly as long as the average $2 novel in itself. In addition, the number of short stories and novelettes can be increased.

The new Unknown Worlds, as it reaches the stands, will differ externally only in the larger size. The same type of conservative cover will be retained; it has been unmistakably approved by the majority of the readers.

And, if your newsstand dealer doesn't have a copy when you get there, he can always get it for you quickly.

But don't look for Unknown Worlds among the newsprint magazines in October.

The Editor.

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Don't fail to read the July issue of

YOUR *Charm*

THE CASE OF THE FRIENDLY CORPSE

by L. RON HUBBARD

Jules didn't want to be a necromancer. In fact he shouldn't have been one—particularly after he mixed, half and half—wrong halves at that!—the formula for reviving and restoring corpses and the formula for winning friends and influencing people.

Illustrated by Edd Cartier

"I TELL you I don't want to graduate! I tell you I have no desire upon this earth or in any other to become a professor of ancient languages! I tell you that I am in full, ferocious revolt, and in a matter of seconds I'll blast

apart like a bomb from repression, concession, obedience and unpentable maniacal violence!"

So screamed Jules Riley, to become a doctor of languages in a matter of seconds. But he screamed it silently.

The hall was placidly thronged with fond parents and waiting sweethearts; the stage was sleepily peopled by drowsing professors and officials; the long line of black-gowned students strayed in from one off-stage door, draped itself like a stuffed black snake of some size across the stage and then fell off to dissolve outside the opposite door. Parchment scrolls were stacked in a neat pile at the right of the college professor, and the pile was diminishing student by student.

"Warrants for confinement to the slow murder of boredom," Shakespeareanly seethed Jules Riley.

Here was the dignity of ancient tradition, the ivy cloisters, the ivory towers of soothing contemplation where the embers of wisdom stayed alight, where learning was a deity lustily enthroned, reigning with a quiet apathy. The students, graduating, were distinctly in the image of that deity. Here they took their departure from preparation to march forward into the stern reality of existence, to the trials of soft leather chairs and the violence of ledgers, to the savage battlements of cashier's wickets, into the stern reality where they would become the presidents and bond salesmen of tomorrow, where they would no more frame the future state of affairs than had their fathers before them.

With Jules it was worse. These, at least many, many of them, would have some chance of escaping the sinuous toils of wretched monotony. But not Jules. Jules Riley had a family which had always looked out for his good, fondly doting upon his brilliance, his sensitivity, his steady grasp upon the fact that a Riley, in Milestown, was—well—a Riley, of course. And his cousins and sisters and aunts all agreed with his father and mother and grandfather and grandmother that Jules Riley would uphold the academic tradition of the family. Jules Riley, in a matter of weeks, would become an assistant professor in ancient languages and, carrying boldly forward, might some day become a professor of ancient languages.

Not that there is anything wrong with being a professor of ancient languages, but that such a consignment for a man of Jules Riley's secret temperament might best be compared to hitching a comet to the plow, stoking a fire with water, or cooking a steak with snow.

Consider for a moment the thoughts of a sailor who, by the flash of the storm's lightning, beholds his hurricane-blasted craft shot down upon the foamy fangs of a lee shore and twirls a useless rudder back and forth under shock-numbed hands. Consider that sailor's mental reaction. You have also considered the inward state of Jules Riley.

But he stood there like 'Er Majesty's Jollies in the *Birkenhead*, drawn in line, ship sinking, at attention.

"George Olsen—Thomas Penton—" How swiftly the president was

sliding down the list to the R's, calmly approaching the name of Riley with no more feeling than a sea bird scudding above the *Birkenhead.*

"Oh, Lord," fervently prayed Jules Riley, "if only You could make a fire break out! An earthquake, a tidal wave, a meteor!"

JULES RILEY doubted his own wisdom, as never before, of getting himself born into the Riley family. It was not that they bullied him. It was not that they disapproved of him. Oh, no. He was their idol, and that was the whole trouble. From the moment he could understand as much as "kitchy-koo, whassa mattah, itto fello," he had been told that he would be a credit to the family. His plans were laid out for him like a dress pattern, and he had followed them. Not because he was meek. But because everyone was so sweet to him that, strong as he was, he couldn't bear to break their hearts. True, he had a few times tried to convince them that they were making a bad monk out of what might have been a good soldier, but his mother had been prostrated and his father had looked sadly at him and had not spoken to him for a week. He could have stood scorn. He could have held his ramparts against slings and arrows, molten lead or cold steel. He could have looked an army in the eye and told it to go to hell. But his portcullis was down, had been down all his life, his bastions were unpeopled, his arrow slots stopped up and his donjon empty. For what could hold out against love? And they all loved him dearly. He would be a credit to the family.

Bold of eye, straight of body, handsome, and even dashing in his way, Jules Riley had broken a few hearts—not because of his deeds, but because he had to be good. His family knew he couldn't be bad. He couldn't be bad. Goodness had gotten to be a nasty habit with him.

In a docile mood, beguiled by green grass as might be a bull being led to the stockyards into seeing no slaughter pen, he had arrived here, three men down from the diminishing pile of diplomas. In a moment the cudgel would fall, or at least he would be carrying his own confinement warrant in his own hand.

The Lord didn't seem to be interested in his prayers. Even the Lord had him smothered with love. Even the Lord knew he was going to continue to be good. Fleetingly there came into his mind, from whence he knew not, since such thoughts were quite foreign to him, a memory of Faust who had contrived to obtain a certain amount of liberty by bartering his immortal soul to Satan.

Briefly he wistfully dwelt upon other cases. He suddenly recalled one which had to do with one Vanderbecken, who had sailed, thereafter, around the Cape of Good Hope. But even helming a storm-bound craft manned by a ghostly crew was superior to putting grades meticulously down to measure the ability of Upjohn and George to translate passages of Sanskrit.

"An earthquake, a meteor—" he was beginning again.

"Randolph," said the president, relentlessly diminishing his list. "Renton."

One more, and then Riley!

Wistfully, Jules gazed over the footlights to the blurry crowd below. Hopelessly he turned back and stepped fatefully forward.

He was aware of having run into something. But he knew that was impossible, for there wasn't anything standing in front of him now, young Rister having moved briskly along. Jules started once more to move, and once more he was blocked. A gentle but inexorable pressure bore him outward toward the footlights. His gown tripped him. He yelped, and then, with the loud explosion of the bulbs he broke in passing, pitched downward to the floor before the stage, a drop which took much longer than its eight feet would seem to require.

Crash!

And Jules Riley hit. And went through!

And through—and further, with a spinning, swirling *swo-o-o-o-o-o-o-op!*

Past things—past other things—comets, stars!

Crash!

Jules came dizzily around with the memory of comets still slashing through his reeling brain and the thunder of novas echoed in his aching limbs. He was in disgrace, he knew, for he would be the first student ever to have fallen into the orchestra pit since Barney Bowles had overplayed Hamlet in '96. His family in the crowd would be pink with confusion. His fellow students would be tittering with satisfaction.

Well, he had prayed for a diversion and he had gotten a diversion. But it had stayed him not at all, at all. He would have to go back up there— He groaned as he pried something sharp away from his side and cursed the makers of all music stands. Hands began to help him, and he glared around, ready to dare them to be laughing at him.

Funny—

It was so dim—

There was no laughter resounding—

And how strange these faces looked! No, they weren't strange faces so much as unseen faces, for the group about him was encowled. He had not seen anyone in cowled gowns in the hall when he had entered. He had not known that such costume formed any part of the graduation exercises. Well—maybe they had changed the procedure.

His helpers had him on his feet now, and one of them was tugging at the thing which had stuck into him and torn his gown. Still dazed, he looked down to see how complete was his ruin—

He must be dead! To have bled enough blood to dye red— No, his gown was not red itself, but only from the reflection of a fiery torch held near. His gown was purple! And so recently it had been black! Further, what was a torch doing where electric lights had been a moment before? Could it be that he had knocked out all the fuses when he bungled into the footlights?

A person, somewhat smaller than himself, gowned in a brilliant scarlet and cowled in velvet, was thrusting back those about him with the thing she had pulled out of his gown.

"He's all right! Leave him alone, you bungling bats! Get back or I'll sic a monster on you!"

Jules was surprised by the quality of her voice—it did something to him which had never happened before, probably because he had never before heard just such throaty tones. In addition, what was a woman doing at Beymouth, where no woman had ever been before? He could catch no glimpse of her face, and so glanced at the white beauty of her hand which tightly clutched the sharp thing. This, he discovered, was a short staff with a point about which coiled a snake.

The others fell back and gave him room to stand, but he caught a flash of evil within their cowls. These were all properly dressed, so far as he could see, for they were in black.

"Oh, darling," said the girl in scarlet, "are you hurt?" The sympathy and love in that voice made Jules quiver again. The contact of her arm about his waist nearly unnerved him.

She guided him back to a ramp which went up, and in a moment their heads came above the level of a stage. However, the scenery had been considerably shifted about, for now the place was like a grotto, and the planks had given way to squares of stone. A leaping flame from a huge saucer on a rocky ledge gave scarlet light to the scene and made the shadows of the few people there go leaping hugely upon the vaulted walls. Slabs of stone were set as low desks, and behind them, three in number, were several men. In a small group in the center of the grotto were perhaps twenty people, all gowned and cowled, the colors of their raiment carrying from deep purple through red to blue. Like sentries at the doors at either side, and ranged upon the front of the cave, were individuals in black who carried, each, a staff such as that the girl had plied.

THE HAIR tingled at the back of Jules' neck, for he realized now that these in black were not human—they were too thin, too small and, besides, their cowls were pierced to allow the escape of each one's single yellow horn. Hoofs, not feet, showed from under the black gowns.

Behind the first desk coiled a clerkish-looking gentleman clad in an orange silk cape. He was the only one present without a cowl, even though his shining baldness indicated the necessity for one. Huge and gleaming eyes were fixed upon Jules now in half-lidded regard.

"Get on with it," said the girl, leading Jules to the clerkly one. "And please don't argue so much, for you know very well that there is nothing whatever to be done about it."

His puzzlement at her words was lessened by the strange fascination her voice had for him. He allowed himself to be stood before the great slab of stone and looked interestedly at the documents which cluttered it.

"Now, now, now," said the clerkly fellow, slimily ingratiating, "that is better. That is much, much better. I'm sure we can get along splendidly, and that there was no real necessity, just now, for your rage in general, and that somewhat spectacular leap into the pit in particular. You know that you must sign this contract in order to complete everything. His satanic majesty would be much piqued if you did not."

Jules glanced about again, unsteadily. He recalled now what he had thought to himself about selling his soul to the devil, and now—

"This . . . . this, then, is . . . is Hades!" said Jules.

"Tut, tut, tut," said the clerkly fellow, wiping his yellow pate. "That fall must have addled your wits a bit. Now just be calm. Here, let me soothe—"

"No!" said Jules, for the yellow-gowned gentleman made to rise.

"Then you tell him, my dear," said yellow gown to the girl.

"Darling, listen to me. You are all right, and all is well, and so, come quickly to yourself. This is the same old university in the same old place. Now please, sweet."

"University?" said Jules. "What university?" And then, glancing around, "Where?"

"Why, the University of the Unholy Names," said the girl in scarlet. "And in Death Valley, just as it always was. And this is the auditorium on the third sub-level. Come, come, Achmed, my love. Brace up!"

"Perhaps a drink of this—" insinuated the clerkish one, putting out his hand, where suddenly appeared from nowhere a cup of frothing solution.

"No!" said the girl. "Achmed, sweet, are you all right now?"

"Yes . . . yes, I'm all right. This . . . this isn't Hades, of course. And you aren't the d—"

"Hush, hush," said the yellow one, slightly shocked. "His satanic majesty would be insulted. I am Eblo, the clerk, and I am here tonight to facilitate matters for the faculty. Now let's have no more of this. To be blunt, my boy, blunt! Achmed el Abd Mahmud, do you or do you not sign this contract for a year's service?"

"Of course he does," said the girl. "He knows as well as I do that he cannot get his doctor's degree until he has sold his soul to his satanic majesty —or at least rented it. Achmed, beloved, think how you would break your father's heart if you failed at this last moment. How he has slaved to keep you here and give you proper education. You have promised to go through with it to the best of your ability, and why falter now, when six years of hard study already lie behind you. In a matter of minutes you will graduate, and with honors. Why put a bar to the *fait accompli* by this belated stubbornness?"

CLEARLY, they had him confused with another. Clearly, this University of the Unholy Names was a strange place indeed.

But what could he do?

"I am not Achmed el Abd What-you-may-call-it," said Jules. "I am Jules Riley."

"Tch, tch," said the clerk. "My boy, that is but a feeble dodge. Why, as a freshman here in this very place I thought of much better alibis. Don't tell me that the institution is in decline. Ah, yes, when I was a freshman here, my boy, I even founded a tradition for alibis. I well recall one evening when a dean caught me in the truth—"

"What," surrendered Jules, "kind of contract is this?"

"Yes, yes. The contract," said the clerk, broken from his reverie. "Why, just a standard contract. 'I, Achmed el Abd Mahmud do hereby consign and deliver to his satanic majesty for the period of one year from date my soul in properly foul condition and all sin therein, and do hereby confirm that said soul is not held by any claim, lien or chattel mortgage—' Just a standard contract, my boy."

"How . . . how can one get out of such a contract?"

"How? You mean at the end of the year? Why, if one has failed to break any and all of the ten commandments during that year, he is, of course, in bondage for eternity, but people usually ask for renewals of the contract, anyway—"

"To break . . . break *all* the ten commandments in that year?" said Jules.

"Naturally. One must do something for the powers that be, you know. It's quite a favor on our part, you know, to let you sign this contract. In fact, I might refuse and then you would never graduate, for your record to date has not been of a kind to invite our faith in you. For instance, take that day, two years ago, on sub-level six, when you defended a fellow student. Tut, tut. And that midnight you did not laugh, but even protested when the two priestesses were thrown to Thoth-Uggal—even though you knew that our dear mascot here must eat. Oh, I have your record here, event by event, and it is only the persuading of Miss Megaera Zidan here which caused me to offer this contract at all. Now, my dear fellow, please stop wasting our time and sign here. If you do not"—he repressed a yawn —"I might have to whistle up the guards and an iron maiden, you know. Or perhaps the lead boot."

"Sign, darling," pleaded Miss Megaera Zidan in her most lovely voice.

Jules sighed. "I tell you I am Jules Riley, and if I sign Achmed el Abd Mahmud to this it will be forgery."

"Ah!" said the clerk, instantly interested again. "A forgery would be delightful. He thought of a forgery," he commented to a horned sentry behind him. "My boy, I take back what you said. Forge it by all means!"

Baffled, Jules wrote, in his neat hand, "Jules Riley,"

"A copy," said the clerk. "And his satanic majesty's blasphemy tenderly upon you both. Go, my children."

JULES took the proffered document and Miss Megaera Zidan swiftly piloted him toward the next stone slab.

Here sat a man in a deep-violet robe, but neither cowl nor robe could hide the fat greasiness of him. He was outlined by the fiery saucer behind him, and so Jules could not see his face.

"Achmed, my boy," said the man behind the slab, with a laugh which was babbling, "I am so glad you progressed so far. I damn, old fellow, the day you were enrolled by me I never thought to graduate you. Didn't we find a crescent and star on you? Ho-ho-ho! Where is the skin?"

The girl took out two sheets of soft-tanned leather and gave them to the plump little registrar, glancing sideways at tall Jules beside her as she did, as though he might reprove her.

"So you have them, Meg?" said the registrar. "Good little Meg. Always looking out for you, Achmed, old boy. Always looking out for you. I damn you'd be a saint or worse if it weren't for Meg! Well, now," he added, examining the skins, "where is the certificate here?"

Meg passed him a scrap of paper and pulled her cowl tighter so that Jules might not see her face. She appeared very shy about this proceeding.

"'Certified to being the blood-tanned skin of a hermit stabbed in the back while at prayer—'" mumbled the registrar. "Ah, yes, yes, yes. All in order. Witnessed by a member of the faculty—that's yours, of course, Meg. Now Achmed's—"

Meg slipped another paper into Jules' hand, and before he realized it he had raised it high enough for it to be taken by the registrar.

"'Certified taken from a temple girl in Bjsallah who was attacked and murdered while taking her vows—' So far so good, Achmed, but where is the witness?"

"I witnessed it," said Meg quickly.

"Perjury. Ah, that's good," said the registrar. "Of course, no women except temple guardians are allowed in Bjsallah."

"I was there," insisted Meg.

"Ah, splendid. Now, let us get down to inscribing your diplomas properly." And his pudgy little hand went scrawling across the skin with many

flourishes, pausing from time to time to dip his filed-tooth pen into a small pot of blood which slowly congealed on the slab. He then paused and ran through the records.

"Miss Megaera, I run over this quickly to make sure. You are graduating with a degree of Bachelor of Satanic Sciences. Yes?"

"Yes."

"Good, I shall fill it in with specialized courses noted. Now, then, the courses were, I believe, distributed through the Abominable Triad of the College of Magic, the College of Demonology and the College of the Inhumanities as follows: Druidism, Elements of Sorcery (a, b and c), Advanced Thaumaturgy 112, Elementary and Advanced Transformations (Magic 56), Elementary Vampirology (Demonology 25), Graduate Demonology, Demonology 60, that's research—oh, yes, Advanced Demoniac Possession a, b and c. Then Inhumanics 13 and 14, Inorganic and Organic Alchemy, Elementary and Advanced Blasphemy, Inhumanics 45, Satanic Music, Elementary and Advanced Cabalistics, Symbolism and Inhumanics 53, Demoniac Alchemy. Average grade, A. There, my girl, is that all?"

"Yes," said Meg.

"Very good, very good. I damn, my girl, you've been a wonderful student here, and we shall hate to miss you. I've often thought I might persuade you to get a doctor's degree, but—"

"I am sorry," said Meg, "but I must remember that my work lies with Achmed's."

"Yes, yes; to be sure. Now, Achmed, my boy, what *was* that thesis of yours. Let's see," and he rummaged through his files. "Say, we'll have to be hurrying it up, for its nearly time for midnight chapel. The last one for you both, you know. Oh, yes, here it is: 'A Method for the Release and Control of the Elemental Otha-Thug, graduate student deceased during demonstration, degree conferred posthum—' No, no! That's the wrong one. 'The Synthesis of Uses of Candles from the Corpse Fat of Thibetan—' No, that's not it."

"You won't find it there," said Jules, "for the good reason— Ouch!"

"It was 'A Treatise on the Elementals of Space Described by the Dimensions Delta, Theta and Psi,'" said Meg.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes," said the plump registrar. "And here it is." So saying, he flourished his pen over the human parchment and sweepingly wrote Achmed el Abd Mahmud's doctor's degree.

When he had finished he passed these—in a somewhat strange fashion, thought Jules, since they were wafted by no visible force from desk to desk—into the possession of a gentleman who could be no other than the president of the university.

MEG URGED JULES toward the final desk with an admonition to be swift, for already the other students had gone, and somewhere a gong was howling a summons with dismal hoops of sound.

The president's head was drawn over tight with skin, and no flesh between skin and skull. But he appeared to be very pleasant, even though his smile was a little ghoulish, and he looked from Jules to Meg and back again to Jules.

"My children," he said in a rusty-hinge voice, "I have much pleasure in giving you these fruits of your labors. You have studied hard and well, and though we have had our little differences—ha-ha—we have all been happy together here, I think. It is with great feeling that I send you forth into the world, for I know you will be a credit to the University of the Unholy Names and abide by all the satanic, demoniac and necromantic knowledge you have been taught, thus giving a bright luster to our famous and ancient institution. Achmed, my boy, all has not been smooth for you, and if I did not believe that you were inclined well into our teachings I would not have you standing here. But I know that you are versed and steeped now, and I might never have known how faithfully you have been educated had I not seen for myself—"

"He is modest, your excellency," said Meg hastily. "Don't make him blush."

"Well, well, no mention of it, then. And Meg, my dear, you cannot know how fondly I feel toward you for the work you have done with Achmed—for I must say, my dear, that we all despaired of his ever graduating until you pledged yourself to guide him, even though you were only a freshman and he a lordly junior. Meg, my dear, you have heaped laurels upon our institution, and you will, when you go out into the world, heap more, that I know.

"Achmed, my boy—or I should say 'my man,' since you are now twenty-five—I know you will be inducted into the Diabolical Extra-Dimensional and Mysterious Order of Necromancers and Sorcerers, for I myself, after what you did yesterday by sending—"

"How wonderful!" hurriedly cried Meg. "Into the D. E. M. O. N. S. And I thought your degree grade would be too low!"

"On my personal recommendation!" beamed the president. "And when I, J. Klark, recommend, they always go through! Achmed, it will save you years. And when you are confronted with their tests, do not be terrified. Think, my boy, think. And remember that your solutions will bring you through alive or at least partly intact. For we have taught you well and upon your passing their tests depends the reputation of the University of the Unholy Names. Of course, I always say that. Of course, you might even fail. But I doubt it, my boy. I doubt it."

Jules tried to speak, but could only open his mouth.

"He is overcome," said Meg.

"Here, then, are your diplomas, my children. Go to the devil in peace!"

Meg took Jules' arm and piloted him toward the midnight chapel. Fondly beaming, President Klark came behind them.

As they passed into the smoky and dim interior and took their seats near

the altar amongst all the other students, Meg gave Jules' arm a loving squeeze. But though Meg's presence made him giddy, and though his senses were spinning amid all these happenings, Jules tried valiantly to remonstrate against everything to her.

"Hush," said Meg before he had said more than a word. "Be quiet. They are about to sacrifice the goat and begin."

II.

Jules Riley awoke with the feeling of one who has experienced a dreadful nightmare—except that the dreamer is always heartened to discover that his dreadful visions were not true. Jules Riley was prepared for the blissful reaction of realization, and even half contemplated it, before he knew that he was not in his own bed, that this was not his dormitory room, and that, though he must have slept many hours indeed, it was not daylight.

The instant he moved he had the feeling of being sledged on the skull by a mighty smith, and so eased back with a dull groan to contemplate his confines from the comparative painlessness of his pillow.

He scanned, as far as he was able, his confines, and the discovery that this was in no sense a room chilled his heart. For rooms are made of boards and plaster, and rooms have windows and curtains; here were no boards, but earth and stone. This was no room, this was a cave! The domed roof, smoke-blackened and rugged, swept from base across to base, and the floor, earth save for where it was covered with beautiful if worn rugs. Thirty men might have squeezed into the place, but the outermost of them would have had to stoop. Some sort of ventilator, crudely cut through the roof, let down a single shaft of light, very dim, and a warm zephyr of air. The doorway was arched and led out to an upward-curving ramp, this visible because the door had slots in its ancient oaken self and because of an oil cup which wavered a flame above outside.

A brass lamp, long and gracefully curved, was burning in a niche, the naked bit of flame lapping high and low at the command of the breeze from the ventilator. This light illumined a small painting which Jules mistook to be that of a saint and discovered, on concentrating, that it was a live something imprisoned behind glass.

Here and there the walls were hung with strange objects, talismen tufted with human hair, or set with human teeth or small bags from which swept oddly painted feathers.

There were two stone desks in the room before which cushions were piled, desks which supported masses of brown papers and books, and presided over by tall candles. These were at the foot of each of the two beds.

Jules turned his head a little more and was knifed between the eyes and at the base of his neck by horrible pains. He lay still, trying to remember just why he should feel so terrible.

The black chapel he recalled vividly, particularly the streams of blood

which ran from the throat of the sacrificed goat and down into the grooves of the altar and so into cups. He tried to recall the import of the chants which had been sung by the students, the chants which had been preceded by a long talk by the president and succeeded by a scalp-stirring array of apparitions who cavorted on command.

AFTER THAT, pondered Jules, everyone had gone into a huge banquet hall, another mammoth cavern, where refreshments were whisked out of air by a number of strangely unhuman individuals who knelt to be commanded. Evidently the entire student body had been there, each man or woman gowned in either blue or red, for the place had been packed; the faculty in deep-violet gowns and a sprinkling of graduates in purple had moved sedately about. He feared he would not be able to recall anyone to whom he had been introduced, for the light from the wall niches and the incubi-carried torches had been poor and flickering, and, further, everyone had been hidden under a cowl.

For a little while he pondered on the music he had heard, for it was certainly unearthly stuff, eating into the emotions without taking a detour through the ears. It had been like dream music, for all one could remember of it was the effect and none of the melody, nor even what instruments had been used.

The dancing, too, had been very strange, for it had consisted of minuet-like activity of the whole company, which evoluted cabalistic design after cabalistic design in swift and mad succession, some of them three-dimensional.

But that didn't answer his headache. No. His headache. Hm-m-m. Headache. Oh, yes, he had been thirsty. Very thirsty. And a strangely unhuman servant had come at Meg's beckoning to kneel and present a tray on which appeared two tall glasses, apparently beer. But beer in such a small quantity could have no effect upon a man.

Then the bonfire in the open air. Maybe the night wind had given him the headache. But no, that had all been pleasant. Snake dances, and then line dances, and much chanting— Hm-m-m. That was strange. He could remember the beginning of that bonfire business but he couldn't remember the end of it. He had drunk a second glass of "beer," which Meg had given him— Certainly! He had drunk that second glass of beer and *boom!* That had been the end of his remembering anything distinctly. He thought he recalled riding somewhere on something at a terrifying speed, but he had not been terrified at all despite—well, he couldn't exactly recall, but it had been very dangerous business. And then that fight somebody had had with somebody— Wasn't he involved there some way?

He relaxed. That had been the cause of his headache. The second and perhaps the thirty more "beers" he had drunk. He was certain now that they had not been beers at all, for beer is bitter in a way, and these had been rather sweet. Why had Meg— . . .

For that matter, where *was* Meg? Where had he left her? How had he gotten here?

Thickly now he pondered his plight, dwelt shudderingly upon his future. Here he was in possession of a degree as Master of Inhumanities and, if he recalled rightly, he would soon be examined by some society of necromancers, an examination which was sometimes, as he had gathered, fatal. Could he possibly escape before that happened to him? Even if one did know the courses taught at this university, the president had inferred, one might not live through—

Oh, his head!

He saw that he had a roommate, and formed a polite morning greeting to be sent to the shadowy figure under the covers of the other bed. He was thick-witted indeed, for all he could think of was "How are you?" and that in archaic Arabic, his major study at Beymouth. Funny to be trying to think up the English for an antique tongue. How he could use some water!

Wait! He had known all through the night past that something was awry with the way people spoke, but he had not been able to evolve the reason. And now he knew. Everyone, from the moment he had landed in that pit, had been talking archaic Arabic! But—but—but now— Oh! He groaned pathetically, for it would seem that the knock on the head had completely obscured any English he might have known! Was he doomed forever to speak Arabic? What if he got back to his own land? Would he continue to speak Arabic? What a dreadful plight, mourned Jules, centering his attention on this inconsequential rather than face the whole canvas of disaster.

Maybe his roommate would be able to help him find a drink of water before he burned to a cinder.

"Good morning," said Jules courteously.

"Umphbo-o-o," muttered the mound of covers on the other bed. "Whafda?"

"Good morning," said Jules persistently.

"Glubfusooo?" protested the other bed.

"Good morning," said Jules persistently.

The other bed tossed convulsively, and Jules then saw that it wasn't so much a bed as a pile of pillows heaped high. The multicolored spread rippled back and a white arm came to view, stretched straight up, and then dropped to vigorously employ its hand in the work of rubbing wakefulness into eyes.

"E-e-e-e-yum!" yawned his roommate. With more vigor, the covers moved again.

JULES GAWPED and gulped, for at Beymouth men always had men for roommates, and to break such a rule would cause instant expulsion. It was bewildering to see a silk-slipped young lady push herself partly up from her pillow and yawn again. But the fact that she was here, no matter how much

it shocked him and made him glance in apprehension up the ramp for fear they would be discovered, reacted upon him in another way. His heart beat in his throat, and his breathing was paralyzed. In common with anyone in his world who went to movies or read magazines, he thought he had seen some lovely women, but this young lady instantly, on first sight, even though she was half asleep and tousled, consigned all he had seen in times past to an ignominious scrap pile.

She was a vivid redhead who seemed crowned with spun gold rather than hair; her eyes were a startling and fascinating green; her skin was fair and pale, more so by contrast with the blood crimson of her beautifully full lips. There was something about the shape of her face and her throat, a delicate symphony of curved lines, which made one turn hot and cold with emotion and feel like a devil exalted. And there was about her, enhancing her, a radiance and poise of being which rendered her magnetic to a point where to look at her was to go to her. She was sweet and wonderful and magnificent, of the stuff of poems and delirium. And one did not have to glance again to know that here was a woman among women, and the most dangerous of them all.

"Hullo, darling," she purred, yawning like a drowsy kitten.

He recognized her voice. "Meg!"

Her green eyes narrowed a little, and an awareness came into her voice. "And *whom* did you expect to find here?"

"Won't somebody come and . . . and discover you?"

She was puzzled a little, and then brightened. "Oh, you mean about the dean of magic." She laughed lazily. "He won't remember that we pushed him into the river. And even if he does, why, we've *graduated!*" The memory of that spurred her fully awake. "Oh, Achmed! Isn't it glorious? We've graduated! Dr. Mahmud! Mistress Zidan! No more crayon, no more talk, no more feeding monsters chalk!" She threw a pillow at him and sprang up to seize her scarlet gown, but in the act of putting it on, paused and then discarded it to kneel beside a brass-bound chest and rummage therein. "No more red gown. We've graduated, Achmed. Isn't it marvelous? Four long years of grind, grind, grind, and then, at last, we are free! To walk again in sunlight, to talk again with people and know they are terrified of you, to take lives and twist them into tangled masses, and then take gold to untangle them again! To conjure elementals without having to ask permission! To walk above sultans and spit upon their gold! To be gay, to be devilish, to *live!*"

Meanwhile, she had found the desired raiment and slipped into it to stand in admiration of herself. Jules, hearing no more rustling of cloth, thought it safe to look, and was struck by her shapeliness, for the new gown, dark green, clung intimately to her body. The train of it swept in a curve about her feet, and the cowl, also of velvet, drooped below her shoulder. She was buckling about her a belt made of great, golden stars. She turned now so that he could see her all about.

"Nice?" said Meg.

"Beautiful," choked Jules.

She flung her arms about him and kissed him on the forehead. "That for the only compliment you have ever given me!" she cried, and then went whirling away to poise in the center of the cave and cry, "Ligdo bano, skelma trano. *Baleesh!*" With the last word she clapped her hands twice quickly and then once.

SMOKE GUSHED from the rocks of the roof and a sandpaper-skinned being with cylinders instead of feet, and huge hands with nails instead of fingers, was bowing low before her and trembling as it raised its eyes to her belt.

"A breakfast for two, Baleesh," said Meg. "And mind you now, no questionable eggs this time. This is special!"

"I hear and obey," trembled Baleesh, and went sprinting up the ramp.

"No bad eggs, now!" cried Meg after him. "Come, Achmed. Up! It must be an hour after sunset, and we have so much to do. Didn't your father send you a presentation gown? Of course he did!" And she dug into another huge chest, to presently come up with something that sparkled and rustled, which she threw at him.

As she dropped down on the cushions before her desk, Jules slipped into the huge cloak and found it to be of black velvet. He belted it about with a flexible metal in the shape of a bolt of lightning. He started when he was arranging the cowl, for it bore a silver skull which grinned in a place which would be over his brow.

"Marvelous!" cried Meg, turning. "And it will be even more beautiful when you have possessed yourself of the striking serpent of the D. E. M. O. N. S."

When he bent to look at himself his head throbbed violently, and he sank down on the cushions before his desk. She had noted his expression of pain and was quick to pour some liquid into a bowl.

Under protest he imbibed the bitter fluid and instantly felt better.

"My, Achmed, how you have changed!" cried Meg. "Is this in celebration of the graduation?"

"What?" said Jules.

"Why, taking a potion from me. You and your continual suspicion of love potions. Ah, me, my darling incorruptible, break it gently if you are to smile on me at last!" Then, without waiting for him to answer, she knelt and assumed a pleading tone. "Maybe you will even allow me to see what you have in that mysterious packet of yours?"

"Packet?"

"The one which you gave Slingo, of course, and told him never to give away except to yourself. Slingo is so stupidly faithful to you! The first familiar I have never been able to hex into obedience. Call him now, darling. Here, I'll call him for you!" She leaped up and cried: "Ligdo bano, skelma trano. *Slingo!*" And, as before, clapped her hands.

SMOKE poured in from the solid stone and congealed into a being about five feet tall who wore a clout about him and leather buckets to cover his feet, and whose spherical skull was ornamented with two stubby, blunt horns. He looked both anxious to please and terribly stubborn, and not too bright.

"I hear and obey," croaked Slingo, "*if* my master Achmed calls."

"He calls," said Meg. "He wants the packet."

"Master Achmed wants the packet?" said Slingo to Jules.

"Yes," said Jules, with difficulty getting his heart going again, for these appearances somewhat startled him.

Slingo bent down on all fours and screwed his neck around so he could look up into Jules' face. Then he reached up and poked a finger at Jules' eye. Jules blinked and drew back, protesting.

"Good," said Slingo. "Want to make sure Achmed not under spell." And he became smoke, vanished, became smoke and congealed. He had a thick parcel in his hand which he put down upon Achmed's desk. "Me careful," he stated. "You say never show miss, I never show." And he looked in triumph at Meg. She reached into the air, hefted a wand and made it swoosh in Slingo's direction, but before the swoosh was final, Slingo was gone.

"A stupid fool, that Slingo," said Meg.

"He seems to be very faithful," said Jules.

"Faithful but stupid," said Meg. "Mark me, Achmed darling, he'll get you into serious trouble one of these days. Serious trouble. He's *so* stupid and thinks he's *so* bright. I'd trade him, if I were you. You could get another one entirely and a really good one for eighty *daras* right here at the school store. Or, of course, you could command one out of dimension gamma tau if you want to take a chance. I love you so much I'll even take the chance for you! There! Now open the package, please."

It was very difficult to refuse that coax, such was the quality of her voice. But Jules, while he might find himself in difficult circumstances, was not and never had been a fool. Obviously there had been an Achmed el Abd Mahmud. Obviously Jules Riley would only get into more serious difficulties if he went around crying that something had happened to his identity. Obviously Achmed el Abd Mahmud had had good reason for not wanting Meg to see these papers.

"No," said Jules.

"Oh," pouted Meg. "And I thought you had changed. Achmed, darling, please—"

He was saved from the difficulty of further refusal by the entrance of Baleesh and breakfast. Meg was instantly concerned about the quality of the eggs, though she did look meaningly once or twice at the packet. Baleesh spread the fare out in its black bowls and put down the wooden spoons, and Jules made room for Meg at the desk and, side by side, they ate. The food was strange, being compounded of rice and scrambled eggs and crunchy shoots and odd spices. The drink seemed to be tea, for, even though scarlet, it was quite palatable, sweet and bitter all at once. When she had finished,

Meg pressed together some compotes of paste and almonds and figs and fed them to Jules and herself as she dreamily eyed the packet.

"No," said Jules.

"Did you ever see me in a temper?" said Meg. "Well, much as I love you, I shall storm tornadoes, rend rocks— Oh, Achmed beloved, won't you please show me?"

"No."

He was saved from further coaxing by the arrival of a black being about five feet tall and very fat, who put brass-ringed hands on the door bars and called in, "Mistress Zidan! Already the audience cave is thronged with ones seeking to hire graduates, and they call for you each time they see your name so high. There is one, Mistress Zidan, who has an oasis near the sea in which he declares a being tears up the palms, and he offers much gold to be rid of the being, and he calls your name."

"Greasy cutthroats!" said Meg. "After excellent spells and offering small coin just because they know our status as new graduates. Tell him to go away and hire a professional. I've other work, Labsa."

"He offers three weights of gold," said Labsa.

"Hm-m-m. That's enough to rent an office," said Meg. "Lead on, Labsa! I'll be back in a little while, Jules."

"Another calls for you, *Dr.* Mahmud. He has an aunt he wishes vanished," said Labsa, grinning like a black full moon. "An aunt and a mother-in-law as well. He offers an entire weight of gold, and he sings your name from the graduate list!"

"I can't see him," said Jules. "I am busy here."

"As you say, *Dr.* Mahmud," said the impudent Labsa.

"Lead on," said Meg, and pulling her cowl up to completely hide her face, followed after him up the ramp and out of sight.

JULES HEARD their footfalls die and then eagerly scooped up the packet. Here, he suspected, was the clue and the explanation of what had happened to him. It appeared to be an enormous book, and the many papers for it were heavy enough to break an arm. Its seals were thick and impressed with an A spelled with thigh bones. He broke the paper away and inverted the paper which met the light.

First was a scrap of parchment with an address upon it: Street of Leather Trades, Sixth Shop, Falls, Mogrook Province.

Second was a sweepingly written contract which, with many aforesaids and hereafters, bound one Slingo to the human Achmed el Abd Mahmud for twelve years from a period two years past in return for the release of one Drauns, prince of the black souls conjured and chained by one Achmed el Abd Mahmud.

Third was a will of one Achmed el Abd Mahmud, giving his books, papers, any weights of gold laboratorily alchemized extra-curricularly, and a

described magic poniard to one Mistress Megaera Zidan and, to his father Benj el Abd Mahmud, his gowns.

Fourth was a copy of documental release of any blame or claim for the loss of life, during university work, of one Achmed el Abd Mahmud, on the University of the Unholy Names, in case of any misculculations arising from any demonological, astrochemical, or research work of any kind without regard to advice offered by any member of the faculty leading up to such accidental release of life from one Achmed el Abd Mahmud.

Fifth was a certificate of spell innoculation, signed by a university physician.

Sixth was a packet of sketches, giving the name of each person sketched and a description of that person, telling where each lived and what relation he was to Achmed el Abd Mahmud, stressing in particular the habits of the father of Achmed el Abd Mahmud and inclosing two sketches of him and a sketch of the leather shop, and also a brief note as to the best ways of getting money out of him.

Seventh was a letter. And Jules did not blink at all to find that the letter was addressed to him.

JULES RILEY
University of the Unholy Names
Arsenic Riverbank, Death Valley

MY DEAR LIBERATOR:

I cannot tell you with what affection I write this, but perhaps I can prove it by bequeathing to you all my belongings, my family, my hopes in this dimension, and even my body. Suffice to say that I have tried to do everything in my power to keep you from falling into any error in that which is now, and will continue to be until you die, your way of life and your world as you see it about you now.

In addition, my dear fellow, I bequeath you Mistress Megaera Zidan, and not, I assure you, without a little grief, for she is a dear and darling girl of whom I have long been secretly fond, for all that she can be a devil cat and a hurricane in one as well as a gentle and devoted sweetheart. She is not nearly as bad as the fury after which she is named, for dear Meg has a great heart. But I shall not grow as warm as I feel on the subject of Meg. Her behavior toward you will be, to you, very strange, just as the world in which you find yourself is strange. Suffice to say that Meg is a good girl for all her studies. Her greatest aim in life, I fear, has been to please me, and now, to please you, for there is no difference. It was Meg's original thought to thoroughly corrupt me, and she has continually upbraided me for conduct which might be very good in your past world, but which is not good at all in the blasphemous portals of the University of the Unholy Names or in any student of the dark arts. Meg will save you during graduation, that I know. I am afraid I love her, and oh, how violent has been my struggle to refrain from so much as kissing her hand. I leave you to your own judgment about Meg. She will save you and damn you all at once.

And now to the reasons underlying the situation in which you find yourself, for you may possibly consider it a bit strange, being unused to such things and carefully educated by a rather blind civilization into the belief that demons and black arts do not exist, as they, of course, do, which any one of your late fellow men could discover with even a slight endeavor.

I, Achmed el Abd Mahmud, was born to inherit a father's ambition that I become a necromancer among necromancers. I have tried hard because I really love my father, particularly in his loneliness since the death of my mother. But I cannot envision a life as a necromancer, for I wished to do good to humanity, and I would have liked some gentle existence such as that you have left.

Two years ago, when I received my bachelor's degree as a Bachelor of Demonology, I had it in my power to begin to escape. Through details which I will not set down to weary you—and do not want you to know, indeed—I was able to visit your dimension, a few steps above our own. I read the revolt in your mind against your destiny and, by timing things well, was on hand to drop you through and take your place when you were about to graduate. I have studied your school books better than I have my own and, because my native tongue of Arabic is that you were to teach—a stroke of fortune for me—I had only to master your English, which I did in the same way that I made sure you would intimately know our tongue where you are now.

There are many dimensions, as you must know; some of them are much more horrible than any we will ever be able to visit by any means. The dimension which you have arrived in is a lower one than that into which I have planned to go—the dimension in which you were born. Your present dimension, delta epsilon gamma, is close to the demon dimensions. In fact, as one goes down from delta epsilon gamma he finds

nothing but demon and spirit dimensions until he reaches the bottom, a place to which you refer as Hades. From delta epsilon gamma down, one might call the group the Devil's Dimensions, and so do not be much surprised at the occasional entrance into delta epsilon gamma of demons and monsters and familiars. To get to theta lambda psi, the world you have left and where I will now be, demons would have to traverse an additional thirteen dimensions upward and so their presence in theta lambda psi would be most unusual. Higher dimensions than either of us can reach, at least in this life, exist above that of theta lambda psi until one arrives in paradises.

I fear you will find your world, delta epsilon gamma, a most unhappy one from the standpoint of the common people for they are terrified and extorted from on one hand by the D. E. M. O. N. S., the society of wizards, and starved, robbed and beheaded on the other by petty governments and wretched officials. I think the closest parallel in your world to the society of delta epsilon gamma was the Moorish. The period of Moorish conquests took place in theta lambda psi when it sagged, during your Dark Ages, across delta epsilon gamma. Happily the world of Beymouth has raised itself again to a number of thirteen dimensions and so has no more to do with witchcraft, demons and Hades, though, at one time, it was entangled with them. Your late dimension now wholly disbelieves, I think, the actuality of darker acts, for it is now much removed, and familiars, incubi and demons are no longer able to travel through. Your world believes in a better thing, science, but science cannot thrive where a populace is tyrannized like that of delta epsilon gamma.

You will soon be a member of the D. E. M. O. N. S. if you live through it. I might caution you to abide strictly by their mandates, particularly that one which forbids any wizard to have dealings with political forces. Your fate, if you disobeyed that, would be horrible to behold.

I am now in your world and in your body. I have studied your family and find them pleasant if bigoted on the subject of Riley. I will conduct myself in a pleasant and orderly fashion and, after now, never again touch the dark endeavors for any purpose whatever, for I am a shade too honorable to be a necromancer and a shade weary of the stink of demons. You can rest assured that I will live a quiet life, be a credit to your family, community and college and, all in all, save you from having to do it yourself. I leave you a wide field of endeavor. I recommend to you my books and, in particular, the one inclosed.

The book, "Demonology, Chants and Formulas for Every Use Simplified," is the one copy, so far as I know, in existence. I was good in my line and at a great risk of life extracted this from a sub-dimension to you which is peopled by black souls, not human. By application of blackmail—I deeply regret to say—I was able to get it fully translated. On Page 2536 I found the ways and means of reaching your world and changing places with you. This volume will see you through.

Believe me, Jules Riley, I am your debtor and you are mine. I salute you and wish you well, and I can only hope that you wish the same to me.

Your brother samaritan,

ACHMED EL ABD MAHMUD.

ACHMED had been right about his own knowledge of English for the letter was written in that language. And Achmed did not seem to be such a very bad fellow, particularly in view of the fact that he refused to let Meg lead him astray. In truth, Achmed seemed to be an honorable chap in whom one could well repose the trust of person and family. If Achmed had wanted to get away from here, Jules Riley had certainly craved to get away from there.

Still—this *was* a gruesome sort of world and when one considered that he might lose his life taking an examination from the D. E. M. O. N. S.—

Jules looked back at the letter for the page and then opened the volume to where Page 2536 should have been. Thinking strenuously now about the examination as he scanned through the tome written in Achmed's neat hand, he came to Page 2535. Facing it was Page 2540. Between it leaves pages had very neatly been slashed out. And on the margin of Page 2535 was written, "Sorry, old man."

The fact that he couldn't leave even if he wanted to, reacted violently upon Jules. He snatched up the letter to read again in case he had missed a clue, but even as he reached for it the edges charred and it burst into flames, utterly destroying itself.

Meg came tripping back, laughing and ready to tell him about the interview when she saw he had the packet open. Eagerly she reached for the papers and as eagerly looked through them. Then, disappointed, she pouted, "Oh. Just records. And you have had me wild with curiosity for a month!"

Jules propped up a mirror on the slab and looked pensively at himself. He was too well schooled by previous necessity of keeping his dynamite within himself to show any nervousness to Meg.

Back at him pensively looked his image, one, in general description, not too far from his own, though certainly he never would have seen any real likeness. His hair was smoothly black and lustrous. His brow was high. His eyes were dark and seemed to mirror small fires. He was pale and rather handsome in an intelligent sort of way. But the essential difference was that he saw his own true nature come to the fore in that face: proud, violent, arrogant and bold.

He was all mixed up somehow. He wanted to be Achmed just as Achmed wanted to be Jules. But this life—

"You had better hurry," said Meg. "The examination for the D. E. M. O. N. S. is set for midnight and, oh, darling, what a lot of work you have yet to do!"

III.

THE CLATTER and babble of the student laboratory was a soothing and familiar sound to Jules for he had spent so many of his days in just such a place, amid just such young men and women. The benches were just as dirty and acid-stained, the glass jars were in just such a disarray, the floor was damp and water was splashing in dirty sinks. The students were aproned in brown and stood here and there in knots, discussing their problems.

The instant he showed himself, two fellows all the way across the laboratory yelled, "Hi, Achmed!" and came pushing their way to him to grab him one on each arm and hustle him to their bench—and his own, for here was his name scratched with acid into the copper. As he passed other students they greeted him and he smiled back.

He felt very much at home in this collegiate hubbub.

The young blond boy on Jules' right took stand at the bench scratched

"Beezel" and waved his hand at the retorts and burners which were littered there.

"Achmed, you gotta help me," said Beezel. "I tried to get this distillation—"

The boy on Jules' left, whose bench was marked, simply, "Fatty," interjected with scornful tones, "Aw, I tell him he ought to use the blood formula and quit tryin' this junk. He's got two hours left before the D. E. M. O. N. S. exam and he still thinks he can cross an alpha vibration with a jaguar scream!"

"I'll do it!" said Beezel. "I'll do it! You wait and see!" He turned to Jules. "Look. You said once that I ought to try more heat. Well, I tried more heat and it still won't distill. If I can get this fluid properly surcharged with alpha vibrations, then, of course, it will tear a beta monster into several good and dead chunks. But it won't distill!"

Jules looked at the equipment and, from a knowledge of elementary chemistry, saw that the fluid probably would not cool with anything short of thirty feet of tubing, for it still came hazily out of the coil and drifted upward, not downward.

"Wind a lot of rubber hose around that tubing and then run water through the rubber hose. Or, maybe better, put the coil down into a pan of water and run the water through the pan. Then plug up the end of the coil and get a high-pressure built up and you may have it."

"Say!" cried Beezel. "That might work. "I always knew you had a brain on you, Achmed."

"Still won't work," said Fatty. "What are you going to use, Achmed."

"Oh, just standard stuff," said Jules. He opened the big volume he had brought with him and spread the page which began "Monster Incantations." "I think I'll use this one that starts, 'Deepest, darkest, awful beasts—' "

Fatty and Beezel both lurched away from him with a yelp of dismay and several students came over to see what was going on.

Jules grinned, "Oh, I won't finish it!"

A tall lad of the Casanova type said, "Aw, go ahead, there are enough counterspells lying around here to keep back a regiment of black souls. That is, if they work." And he looked wisely around at his fellows who laughed. "Are you really going to use that one, Achmed?"

"Sure," said Jules.

"It's dangerous, but I guess you know what you're doing," said the tall boy.

"Sure Achmed knows what he's doing, Bilsa!" said a girl who then smiled at Achmed.

Bilsa pointed to the apparatus. "What are you up to, Beezel?"

"Leave him alone," said Jules. "He'll have something swell there in a very short time."

"Better than this?" said Bilsa. He tossed a wand upon the desk which

instantly began to grow and grow into the proportions of a huge snake. When it was about ten feet long, Bilsa rapped it on the nose with another wand and it promptly began to shrink.

"That's pretty good," said Jules. "Are you going to use that in the examination?"

"Sure," said Bilsa. He put the two wands into his belt and sat down on a high stool. "I already tried them out."

Instantly interested, the other students gathered around closer and wanted to know where and with what result.

"Well," said Bilsa, "I was going up to Skelos Tower and was about halfway across to it from the main tunnel last night when something came spinning by and stopped.

"It was a man dressed in funny-looking clothes and when he saw me he wanted to know where he was and who I was. I told him and asked him who he was and he said his name was—let's see, what did he say his name was? Hair—Harole She or Shay. Harold Shay, that was it. He said he was a magician from another world.

"Well, I was just about to show the dean this double wand so I said this would be a good time to try it out and see if it really worked. I said I'd make the snake and then he could rear up a monster and we'd see which one won. Well, he seemed kind of upset when I threw down the wand and it began to grow and he yelled some kind of a chant that sounded like mathematics and the snake just kept on growing. I expected to see his monster any minute because he'd said he was a magician from another world and I figured he must be pretty good. But, by golly, the snake just grew up and then grabbed him and ate him up before I could do anything about it."

The students looked professionally at the wands in his belt.

"Pretty good," said Fatty. "Let's hope it's that good when it gets down to monsters."

"Yay!" said the others.

"You think it will work on a monster, Achmed?" said Bilsa.

"Ought to," said Jules.

"Hurray!" yelled Beezel at his apparatus. "It's beginning to distill!"

They gathered around and watched him pour the liquid into a vial. He took a drop of it and let it fall. There was a sharp bang and it blew a two-inch hole in the dirt floor.

"It works!" cried Beezel. "Achmed, you're a wizard."

"That's no news," said Bilsa. He glanced at the time candle burning at the end of the room. "Say, we'd better be getting dressed if we expect to be on time."

They began to drift toward the door and parted there with bantering and shouts.

"See you in the cemetery, Achmed!" yelled Beezel, going off.

"Not if I see you first," said Jules.

Warmed and heartened, Jules went down the long corridor toward his rooms.

Jules Riley—Achmed el Abd Mahmud, Doctor of Inhumanities—was made nervous by the crowd which milled in the auditorium and it was no wonder for here had commingled the members of the D. E. M. O. N. S., individuals so forceful and powerful and, perhaps, evil, that their combined effect filled the air with a black and ominous electricity. Jules, standing just outside the cavern in the rock corridor, peered at the torchlight-splashed darkness of this multitude and then at the raised stage where, he was assured by Meg, he would soon take his tests with other graduate students.

"Why aren't they taking you into the organization?" said Jules to the girl.

Either she did not hear or did not choose to answer. "Don't let them shake your confidence," she said. "They are very snide about the new members, but all you have to do is knock their eyes into their heads with a demonstration and they'll cheer themselves hoarse. Now—"

"D-do you think the spell we worked out will work?"

"Now, now, darling. No stage fright. Of course the spell will work. Just remember the phrases—and you know them well enough after our practice—and you'll have your monster to combat the other monster. And remember the lectures of Dr. Bal Dwin on Systematic Meta-Biology. And if anything fails, why, employ those formulas we rehearsed in Advanced Elementalogy and if they go wrong, why fall back on Dr. Kem Pel's advice that 'when things won't appear, recall your Calculus of Forbidden Dimensions and you yourself disappear.' It will be very simple. No stage fright, beloved, for I couldn't bear to think of it."

"I hope," said Jules wanly, "that these things work."

"Of course they'll work. Here comes your sponsor and I must vanish. Good luck, Achmed my sweet."

She hurried away and he would have rushed after her had not a wasted individual in the rusty-black gloom of his gown and cowl come to stand beside him. This person's teeth were huge and yellow and he lacked lips to the extent of exposing even his black gums. His saucer eyes were feverish and evil, making his face, already so narrow that sunken cheek must touch sunken cheek within his mouth, nearly vanish in comparison. He was good-humored in the same way that a maniac might be who is persuading a child to come into the wood where it may be strangled quietly.

"I am Thaugor," said this somewhat chilling gentleman. "As highest sorcerer in your native city of Falla, Mogrook Province and your sponsor into the D. E. M. O. N. S.—if you succeed." He smiled with calm horribleness as he took Jules' upper arm to guide him and did not seem to notice that his claw nails went deep into the younger man's flesh. "I knew your father in the old days," he continued graciously. "He once recommended, as a city elder, that I be thrown out of Mogrook Province. I do hope that nothing happens to you during your demonstration this evening."

JULES WINCED at each word—but only inwardly. With a casual front he allowed himself to be escorted through the mob and down into a series of chambers under the stage all hewn from solid rock and here and there dample a-drip with rivulets.

"Of course," Thaugor was saying, "I might have been fully repaid by the illness of your mother and the death of your brother."

"Are you threatening me?" said Jules, squaring away.

"Threatening you?" said Thaugor. "My dear boy, don't think for a moment that I would threaten you. It is simply that I am the sorcerer of Falla and as I do not happen to require any other assistant than the usual demons and as I do not believe any competition has yet been successful there in my profession, I was suggesting that you might consider taking up your work in another city. Truly, my dear boy, I have only your interests at heart. Your interests and, of course, your health." He smiled pleasantly and idly scratched himself.

"We will discuss that later," said Jules, trying to restrain a feeling of truculence which urged him to tear off an ear perhaps.

"Ah, but later may be altogether too much later," said Thaugor. "You see, I could cancel, by a wave of my hand, any spell of yours for, of course, you are not nearly so advanced as you suppose."

"Wave away," said Jules, getting angry because he was also becoming afraid.

"Ah, my dear, dear boy," oozed Thaugor, "heat is a fault of youth. I speak quite impersonally of these matters. Now I know exactly what sort of monster you will have for disposition and I could help you very much. In fact, if your spell failed, which spells have been known to do, I could unobtrusively cast up a counterspell for you from the audience and no one would be wiser. Indeed, if you care to sign this agreement I have had prepared and promise faithfully never to practice in Falla, I can do the whole thing for you and you needn't prepare at all."

Jules had seen enough of this world and enough of the procedure ordinarily employed by the university itself to know how foul the double cross would be. Intuitively he recognized that the agreement was nothing more than a ruse to throw him squarely into the lap of His Satanic Majesty, sans corpse.

He looked steadily into the slightly nauseating face of Thaugor and fastened his eyes upon an ugly blemish to reduce the fellow's importance. "I think I can get along," said Jules hollowly. "We can discuss the matter of competition at some other time. Just now we are to prepare for the demonstration and I would appreciate your compliance with the rules by which you must be bound as my sponsor."

"My dear boy, I had not looked for so much spirit. I am, in fact, somewhat offended at the lightness in which you hold my power." Lazily he stretched out a hand and plucked a wand from nothingness. He waved this

over Jules' head and then the wand vanished. Thaugor backed, hand in air, saying,

"Naked babe so powerless,
By blood and bones and souls
I rob your might and wisdom
And consign your spells to ghouls."

Thaugor smiled pleasantly. "Put on a nice show, Achmed."

JULES was so angry that he did not cool for several minutes into the realization that he had been seriously hexed, and with cooling came the usual reaction in addition to the awfulness of realization.

He stared about him and found that he was in a small sorcerer's laboratory, fitted for the purpose of concocting the necessaries for demonstrations. He had passed others in the course of his walk down into this place and had seen neophytes already at work in them. Retorts and flasks, charcoal burners and clusters of skulls and herbs completed the materials in the place. A bench and a three-legged stool completed its furniture.

"'Naked babe so powerless—'" muttered Jules. "The black-hearted swine!" For he had seen enough already to know that spells worked and could be undone quite easily in this intercourse with demons, black arts and the Devil. "'—consign your spells to ghouls,'" he snarled.

Oh, if Meg were only here! If anyone knew a counterspell, Meg would! Somehow—

There was a movement in the corridor outside and a young neophyte was escorted to the upper levels and the auditorium. Jules paced restively about, trying to organize his wits, trying to calm himself enough to think clearly.

Somewhere above he heard a burst of sound which might be applause or laughter and felt like an actor who has just forgotten all his lines and has taken a drink of cyanide by error in the bargain.

Something rustled in the corridor and a head was thrust in. The bristle-topped being said, "Are you the brother of Melgy Boabdil? If so, come quickly for he is dying and calling for you."

"No," gulped Jules, "I am not."

The being sped away to scatter his question elsewhere. Jules sank upon the stool and began to pound his fists upon his brow in hopes of jarring something into his head. Suddenly he recalled Slingo and though a large sign above the desk said, "No neophyte will, under any circumstances, open any books or have intercourse with his familiar," this was a desperate case and one double cross deserved another.

"Ligdo bano, skelma trano. SLINGO!" cried Jules. He leaped up to draw the masking curtain across the door and turned to see his familiar congealing in the middle of the room. Slingo was having difficulty getting into himself again!

"Master Achmed," quavered Slingo. "There is a spell here. I cannot stay!"

"Stay, spell or no spell!" said Jules. "I have been ruined by Thaugor."

"Master, I can do nothing! He is too powerful. Only can want to help!"

"Bring me the big book with which I intrusted you!" begged Jules.

"I cannot do!" cried Slingo.

"Thaugor said, 'Naked babe so powerless—'"

"If he consign spells to ghoul, nothing can be do!" shuddered Slingo, still suspended in air and only his head and one arm visible."

"Tell Meg!" begged Jules.

"She no do nothing, either. Thaugor too powerful."

"Tell her!" for Slingo was fading.

THE FAMILIAR vanished completely and Jules stared at the place he had been. He had had a small idea for it became apparent that he was able to overcome at least some small part of Thaugor's curse. With some vague hope of undoing what had been done, he carefully wrote down the curse in the dirt, said it backward and then spat upon it. He was startled when the action resulted in a small explosion.

There was another stir in the corridor and much commotion above. A body of black beings was carrying a charred body along just as Jules glanced out!

Didn't anybody pass that demonstration? shivered Jules. And then, because he had gone the whole way of fear, he started back to bravery.

Curse or no curse, there was something which Thaugor, knowing little of Jules' true identity or Jules' dimension, might not have included. Ordinary chemistry had been a fair subject of Jules Riley a few years ago at Beymouth, for he and his fellow students had taken out some of their restlessness by concocting the usual run of dangerous things. And here upon the shelf was an array of what appeared to be ordinary chemicals. If he could haul himself out of his funk, perhaps a nicely poisonous chemical stew was called for.

Hm-m-m. It'd have to be something quick and easy to make, and also sudden and certain death. Cyanide? Ought to be a gas, though, and cyanide gas wasn't the deadliest going. Maybe a nice dose of arsine gas? That was certain and sudden death of course—on ordinary life. But magic life might have an unpleasant resistance to something simple, like arsenic compounds. It ought to be both deadly and—

Iron carbonyl! Iron was supposed to be death on magic, and iron carbonyl was, to his certain knowledge, death for anything in the way of life that he'd seen! That was the dope—a watery-looking liquid that would evaporate nicely. His should-be sponsor having rather thoroughly killed any magic spells for him, the possible anti-magic effects of a little iron wouldn't be apt to cause him any further inconvenience—if he remembered not to breathe the stuff.

He began to take down containers and work with swift haste, heartened by the cheers which racked the auditorium above and the failure of the last neophyte to come down in ruins. At least one man had passed!

Swiftly he manufactured his carbon monoxide and heated it and then let it mingle with the iron filings until at last he had distilled, drop by drop, a small vial full of $Fe(CO)_5$. This he corked gingerly, trying not to breathe the while.

$Fe(CO)_5$ lay warmly in his palm, pure and clear and innocent. Jules took another hitch on his nerve. Let them bring on their monsters.

A FEW MINUTES later he was standing under the glare of niche torches upon the stage of the auditorium, being bored into by the assembled eyes of an unsympathetic mass of gentlemen. No wonder graduates went to pieces under this and forgot their spells and incantations! No wonder there were newly gouged and darkly bloody places upon this platform!

He saw Thaugor in the first row and Thaugor was pleasantly smiling at him with all his fabulous teeth agleam.

The master of ceremonies, a puffy little sorcerer in yellow, cried, "Gentlemen of His Satanic Majesty! I introduce Achmed el Abd Mahmud, doctor of inhumanities, aspirant to a sorcerer's and necromancer's license in the Diabolical, Extra-Dimensional and Mysterious Order of Necromancers and Sorcerers!"

A dismal silence came back with the echoes.

"A demon monster from the delta-phi dimension will now be conjured by Brother Xinges Zangola, the distinguished continental wizard!" cried the master of ceremonies.

A black-gowned figure stepped out and with a flourish, scattered around himself a ring of small flames which lit up his bearded face and gave it a most sinister appearance. He raised a wand and wrote a mystical figure in the air, a figure which hung there in smoke, gleaming whitely, and through which he spoke.

"By the mastery of hideous arts,
Dragolsomoli, cantol skee!
By the invidious cry of Ruangsboguy
Soakyn dsy fronso fee!
From delta-phi, engirded round
Upon this stage let a monster bound!
SKELMA ZWANG!"

The auditorium shook with the vibration invoked by the incantation; the air began to scream with swiftly accelerating velocity; choking fumes of brimstone spiraled high, high up into the curtains and then with a crash sufficient to stun, a monster congealed toweringly above Jules Riley.

Jules had not thought it would be so large. He had not supposed that flames would be shooting from its mouth. He wondered if those flames, striking the iron carbonyl might not blow the place apart.

The thing's head was lashing back and forth at the end of its long neck and its tail had already destroyed a wing.

Jules was nearly blinded by the fire and smoke and the blaze of its scales but he did not hesitate.

"Take this, fiend,
And take it well
And carry your soul
Straight back to hell!"

And he pitched the vial straight into the monster's mouth as it descended! Jules scrambled back, expecting to be blown a few yards at least. But when no explosion came, he glanced back and up, expecting now that the monster would simply collapse.

The monster was very much alive for the vial had bounced, unbroken, on the snout, back to the stones of the stage where, belatedly, it sent up a spire of white smoke. The monster started to charge through this, too swiftly to be touched by its awful effects.

Jules closed his eyes and prepared to die game. There was silence.

Jules opened his eyes cautiously. There before the monster stood, of all things, a cow. It was not an ordinary sort of cow, though it had that form, for its eyes were blazing and it exuded a great quantity of heat and it danced back and forth nervously, seeking a way to escape from the beast.

The monster was drawing back for a rush and an attack upon this new target when the cow ran toward the back of the stage and, with a flirt of the tail, leaped through a door.

In stunned amazement, Jules listened to the sounds of pursuer and pursued die away in the corridors and finally vanish. An instant later he was almost knocked off his feet by the explosion of laughter in the audience. Uncertainly he tried to discover if they were laughing at or with him and then saw that they were pointing toward Dr. Xinges Zangola and screaming their mirth in that direction.

There was only one glum member of that audience then: Thaugor sat with folded arms and glared.

About an hour and a half later, eight successful neophytes were grouped upon the stage, taking the oath of the D. E. M. O. N. S. at the hands of the presiding president of the organization, a dark-eyed lady who had the air of carrying His Most Satanic Majesty himself in her pocket and who was addressed as Madame Meel Dread.

In her clear and devilishly beautiful voice, she said, "Repeat again after me, the code of the D. E. M. O. N. S.:

" 'I hereby pledge myself to properly Satanic Conduct on all occasions. I will never give way to any sympathy or charitable emotion. I will never allow continued earthly existence to any person or member who opposes the wishes of the D. E. M. O. N. S. Under no circumstances will I reveal any secrets of the organization. I pledge myself to complete abstinence from all politics and government—understanding that such will lead to my own destruction at the hands of other members—realizing that nothing but woe can attend any man who interests himself in government or politics—understanding that the power of all gentlemen of the black arts results from their complete abstinence from anything governmental or political which would set members at spells points—realizing that so long as sorcerers and necromancers abstain from such interests, sorcerers and necromancers will remain the true rulers of the world. Further, I pledge myself to complete concurrence with the activity of the D. E. M. O. N. S. to remove or otherwise dispose of any member—so engaging in politics or government and to undertake violent means to bring about the early death of such a member. In the name of His Most Satanic Majesty, I will abide by these rules and codes.' "

Jules, with the others, took the oath and then was given the badge of the striking serpent to wear upon his gown.

The induction, having been observed in silence by the members of the D. E. M. O. N. S., was now ended by a solemn procession past the neophytes of the entire assemblage which briefly and coolly congratulated each one.

Jules was very, very glad to escape the place and he nearly ran in his return to his cave, for his nerves were in rather indifferent condition and he knew that Meg would be waiting with a drink. How he ached for Meg's company!

She was waiting for him and dropped a curtain across the doorway after he entered. He collapsed upon the pile of cushions which constituted his bed and, savoring his relief at escape, looked at nothing for several minutes but just sat and listened to his hammering heart grow quieter.

Meg gave him a bowl of a bitter brew and said nothing. After he had partaken of it, he felt enough better to look at her. With a shock he realized how tired she was!

"What's the matter?" he said in quick alarm.

"Maybe it was the strain, maybe the quick trip. I was afraid that you would try to work your spells before Baleesh, Slingo and myself could cover enough ground."

"I didn't try spells. I tried something else."

"What?"

"Chemistry. I made up some $Fe(CO)_5$ after I was cursed—say! A funny thing happened. It turned into a cow instead of a poison gas. A peculiarly hot cow, too."

"Why not? Fe, of course, means fever, just like O stands for the ogle of a man, and CO stands for cow, of course. What is so odd about all that?"

Jules was weak again. Chemical symbols would seem to be a bit more complicated in this world. "Say! What do you mean, cover ground?"

"Why, the three of us had to locate the head of the ghouls and get your spells back. That's where you told Slingo they had been sent. They . . . they cost all the weights of gold you had here. Achmed, the next time you see a sorcerer pluck a wand out of the air, yell 'Echo curses, all reverses!' You had no business letting him get away with all that. You forget the simplest things!"

"I'll remember," said Jules. "We have to live in the same town with that guy."

"We, Achmed?"

"Well?"

"Oh, Achmed, if *we* only could. But, of course, we know how impossible that is. I've tried not to face this night when we would be together no more—"

"What are you talking about?" he cried in terror.

"Why, you should remember. On graduation I am pledged to marriage with Crebo, the richest in our province of Geldra. It was planned long, long ago and I am bound by the most solemnly satanic pledges to become his wife in return for my education. He and my father arranged it and my father relies upon Crebo for complete support even now. You know of this, Achmed."

"But . . . but to have a sorcerer for a wife . . . no politics—"

"The pledge was to insure his house and businesses from any attack if I was educated by him. Achmed, you know these things." Then, suddenly, she looked straight at him and threw back her cowl. She knelt and gripped both his hands and let her dangerous green eyes play upon his face endearingly. "Achmed, after all I had been led to believe, *you love me!*"

He was confused. "Yes. Of . . . of course I love you! A man—would be a fool not to love you! I . . . I'm wild about you! I won't be able to live without—" What was this he was saying? He had no clear idea for just then she kissed him.

"You won't go, then?" said Jules.

She began to cry quietly and withdrew to her couch where she buried her face, her golden hair cascading down as though to soothe her sobs.

"I must go," she said at last. "I must go."

IV.

THERE was an atmosphere of great and evil things in Falla, though the sun bathed the brown slopes and the houses and the deep blue of the harbor was gently serene.

As nearly as Jules could tell, for he had given his anguished mind little

time to dwell upon the fact, Falla was in a position equivalent to that of a small coastal settlement of what, elsewhere, was southern California which place was, of course, so dimensionally removed that Falla never suspected La Jolla and La Jolla never suspected Falla.

In aspect, the place was completely Moorish, having its minaretted mosque, its crooked, goat-jammed streets, its flat-topped, sprawling houses, its mystery-hiding walls and its domed buildings. Upon the hill overlooking the surf stood a palace of imposing proportions, if crumbling aspect, which thrust tarnished domes into the sky and quieted the eye with its gracefully sweeping arches and multi-colored if faded tile. It was not nearly so withdrawn or remote from Falla as it appeared for here resided the ruling head of Mogrook Province, Sultan Slary. Mogrook was more than a province in that it paid no tribute to anyone but was, in fact, an individual state which had once been the head of a far grander political division the rest of which was now independently governed by other tyrannical potentates.

The city of Falla showed evidences common to a community continually drained by its rulers and it was usual, on its streets, to find the steel-capped and white-cloaked soldiery of Sultan Slary extracting taxes in kind immediately from the markets.

Jules, threading his way in the midst of a herd of goats which also sought ingress to Falla through the north city gate, was singled out by a Stodda mercenary who acted here as sergeant of the guard while troopers took taxes from the herd.

Dutifully Jules picked his way to the sentry box and found himself looking upon a mail-clad and white-cloaked individual of swarthy complexion and overbearing manner who now stroked a dirk hilt to emphasize his authority. The man was much bigger than the other people of this province, much bigger, indeed, than Jules.

"Passports, foreigner!" said the sergeant. "We've enough spies in this city as it is! Throw back that cowl!"

Jules eased back the white hood of his djellaba. "I have no passports. I think I am known in this city."

"Ha! A likely tale to get me to pass you through. Are you not aware that Falla is beset by her enemies? Who is here to recognize you?"

A dreadful argument was beginning to soar between three soldier-collectors and the owner of the herd, a white-bearded and toil-knotted old man who argued with the voice tones of a mouse which knows it is to be killed sooner or later anyway.

"But these are but twenty goats I have brought to sell!" wailed the old man. "If you take fifteen from me, why should I come here at all. Take five, take eight. But not fifteen!"

"Shut your face, you insolent beggar!" cried a collector, dealing a backhand blow which sent the old man staggering through his herd. "The will of Sultan Slary is the law of Mogrook and he collects what he pleases from whom he pleases!"

"Foreign pigs!" cried the old man, gaining his balance and failing to heed the blood which spurted from his cheek. "I am starved to the point where I spit upon the will of Sultan Slary!"

There was a sharp, sibilant sound as a sword leaped forth and swept back to strike. Jules dodged to avoid the backward stroke and then, almost involuntarily, gripped and twisted the wrist.

WITH A YELP of dismay the big Stodda soldier dropped his weapon and whirled about, dirk leaping from his belt. This was more than Jules had reckoned upon for there was no time in which to parley peacefully. He snatched up the sword on its second bounce and leaped back, barely escaping the grab made at him by the sergeant, barely parrying the attack of the soldier. The other two men-at-arms, with a glad cry at the prospect of a fight, particularly with one who was not armored and did not seem to be a soldier, swept in upon Jules.

Leaping upward and backward to a wide ledge in the wall, Jules plied his steel. Gymnasium fencing of a very ordinary degree still seemed superior to the weighty and blundering attack these three made.

From somewhere came the voice of the old goatherd, screaming words which Jules had no time to understand. From another somewhere came the clatter of fast-ridden hoofs.

Jules threw his djellaba from his shoulder to clear his arm and then, going further, swept the billowing cloth about to act as a shield. It caught the sword of the sergeant and wrenched it free of grasp. A man-at-arms, seeing an opening, hacked wildly, missed and, while off balance, was slashed down and thrust back to entangle the attempts of his two fellows. The recess in the wall beside him was saving Jules from having to protect more than ninety degrees of front.

Reinforcements were coming up and Jules sought to carve his way out of this place which was suddenly a trap. A crossbowman could make quick work of him if he stayed. With a last swirl of the djellaba he fended the concerted attack and then rid himself of the cloak by pitching it over the swords and heads of his besiegers. He sprang down and started to mount a stairway which led to the wall, thinking he could make his way to the battle. But from above he saw three men coming down abreast, swords drawn.

Jules spun about to seek another way and found himself staring, eye to eye, into the face of a captain who bestrode an armored horse. The officer raised himself in his stirrups to deliver a mighty blow and then suddenly turned pale and palsied, driving spur to kick his mount aside and out of reach.

"Achmed! Achmed!" cried many voices and Jules realized they had been yelling it for some time. "Achmed, the wizard! Achmed!"

Breathing hard and wondering which way next to strike, Jules glanced all around. But the men-at-arms, abandoning two wounded and one dead, were in full flight and the officer was spurring away at a horse-killing rate of speed, heading into the fields, not necessarily toward the palace.

"Achmed! Achmed el Abd Mahmud!" bellowed the crowd. And Jules looked to the inner side of the gate tunnel where a great mob was gathering. The people were old and young, men and women, a swiftly augmented crowd.

"Achmed el Abd Mahmud!" they yelled together. "Achmed the wizard! Welcome home!"

JULES was getting his breath back. He was a little stage-struck now and smiled uncertainly at them and raised his hand to wave and as he did so he saw the black sleeve and realized that when he had thrown off his hooded djellaba he had disclosed to view his black gown with its gold belt of lightning and the symbol of the striking serpent upon his breast. The latter, then, not his prowess with the sword, had put the officer and men-at-arms to flight.

Stepping down from the stairs, he was much embarrassed by the goatherd who knelt in the dust and kissed his hand, thanking him feverishly for his deliverance.

"They are murderers, slaughterers of the old and weak," cried the goatherd. "Say you will help us!"

"I . . . I am not allowed to meddle with politics," said Jules.

"Achmed!" the crowd was bellowing. "Achmed of Falla! Achmed the wizard!"

An old, frightened-faced man darted out, having pried through the press and threw both arms around Jules. From the picture Jules knew him for his father, Benji el Abd Mahmud.

"My son!" cried Benji, in transports of joy.

The mob cheered and engulfed them and bore Jules up to shoulder height where everyone could see him.

An ancient Jules knew to be Thanoc, the alcayde of the town, was crying out above the buzz of the throng, "He is come back! All honor to Achmed el Abd Mahmud! All honor to the son of Benji el Abd Mahmud! All honor to the wizard of Falla!"

Jules smiled happily at them, momentarily jarred out of his own troubles by an exhilarating sense of belonging somewhere. As they bore him along through the narrow streets he saw how poverty-stricken was the town, how ragged the inhabitants, how thin the little children and how scarce the dogs and there welled into him a great pity for the plight to which avaricious government had reduced this place. True, it was no different than other towns through which he had passed but this was—was his town.

"Achmed el Abd Mahmud!" bellowed the ever-increasing parade.

They circled, seemingly by design, around a crooked, black structure which was bounded on all sides by streets as though no other house would associate with it. Here, at the door, hung a foul sign:

Thaugor
Sorcerer
D. E. M. O. N. S.

There was a movement of the blind at the window and Jules was chilled by the brief glimpse of a face so narrow as to meet itself within the mouth and teeth and gums uncovered by lips. Thaugor's malevolent grin held promise.

"Achmed el Abd Mahmud!" bellowed the throng. "Wizard of Falla!"

Men made their way through the marching press and gripped Jules by the hand, crying out to recall favors done to him as a boy, wishing him every happiness here and great prosperity.

Finally they set him down at the foot of a hill and with final cheers, let his father lead him up to a small house which stood alone near a grove. Jules looked back to them and waved and they, as one, waved back.

There was a new sign swinging before the door:

Achmed el Abd Mahmud
Wizard of Falla
D. E. M. O. N. S.

Jules' father looked proudly at the house and said, "I have done all I could, my boy, and it may not be enough for we in Falla are not rich these days. But if you need anything more which you do not wish to acquire by your arts, call upon me. The place is yours." And taking both of Jules hands in his, looked fondly upon him and then turned to go swiftly down the hill.

JULES WENT IN and Slingo materialized to hand him a small box. It contained a talisman of cunning design, more an ornament than magic. The note appended to it said, simply, "With all hope for success and good-by to my darling. Meg."

Suddenly his heart went numb at the thought of her so far away, so lost to him now. Warmth went out of the day.

How could she have gained such a grip upon him in such a short time? he asked himself. But rationalize as he would, he still could not answer the raw nerves within him, each one of which begged to be soothed by Meg.

She was dangerous and damnable. She was too beautiful. She was too kind to him and loved him too much.

To see the only woman who had ever stirred his pulse and then lose her—

He sent a retort crashing across the room and gloried in the way its bright fragments burst upon the brick furnace. If he could only do that to Crebo! Crebo, a greasy, weak wretch who commanded Meg because he commanded money! Crebo! By the Devil's own, he'd like to feel that slippery throat between his two hands! And in the process a beaker smashed and cut him slightly.

Slingo was crouched in the corner silently watching and very much afraid for his master. At last he spoke. "There is formula of forgetfulness in great volume, O Master."

"Who wants to forget?" raged Jules, surprising himself.

But, yes, despite this pain, it would be unthinkable to go through life

without at least knowing one had known Meg. He did not trust Slingo for Slingo thought himself rather bright. Thus, Jules approached the great book, "Demonology, Chants and Formulas, Digested." He opened to the neat index Achmed had written and found the page of the formula and then, finding the page, ripped it out and destroyed it in the charcoal burner. He would never be able to be weak enough to forget her now.

A knock sounded above and Slingo scuttled up the steps to answer. He came back in a moment with a basket, showed it to Jules and then started to withdraw. But Jules had caught sight of the wine bottle and he pulled it to him, extracting the cork with his teeth.

The golden fluid gurgled pleasantly down his parched throat and left the scent of flowers upon his tongue.

In astonishment Slingo watched the bottle drain. "Achmed, my master, get drunk!" cried Slingo.

"That's the idea," snarled Jules. "Drunk enough to forget." Thus proving himself as consistent as another man.

He roved through the laboratory, occasionally trying to seat himself long enough to become interested in Achmed's book for, certainly, he would soon have to do some work.

AN HOUR of this was fruitless and he was relieved when a knock sounded above. He sent Slingo to answer and followed to meet the callers in person.

Three men in white robes of rich material sidled into the room and the last looked back to see if their entrance had been observed. When the last had assured himself it had not, he closed the door behind him and stood at the side of the other two.

All three now dropped the hoods of their djellabas and bowed a greeting to Jules.

In his estimation they were not men one would instinctively choose for friends. Their hair was close-cropped and, though they would not have been mistaken for one another, there was a certain resemblance among them in that they seemed to have similar methods of thought. Guile and sly cunning and circuitous approach characterized them. The tallest, who wore a black beard which was tied with a pearl loop, announced himself and his companions:

"I am Lhacan, general of Mogrook. This gentleman on my right is Forga, counselor to Sultan Slary himself. This eagle on my left is Egra, counselor of finance to Sultan Slary. New wizard, we bid you welcome to our province."

"Thank you," said Jules. "I am honored for this social call."

"It is our pleasure," said Lhacan. "We trust you enjoy great prosperity here."

"Thank you. I trust that prosperity also favors you."

Lhacan glanced at his two companions and then all three glanced through the arch and across the veranda to the sunlight and then at one another again as though they had now agreed there was no time to be lost.

"Wizard," said Lhacan. "We come on business."

"Personal?"

Lhacan looked uneasy. "Wizard, might we partake a glass of wine and discuss this matter pleasantly?"

"I am sorry," said Jules, "but the only wine I had, I drank."

"Our business," said Lhacan with a satisfied smile, "is a matter of statecraft."

"Then I cannot help you," said Jules, "for no necromancer or sorcerer can have aught to do with politics or government."

"How true," cooed the general. "Politics and government have nothing to do with wizards except in extreme emergency. Sir Sorcerer, know that an army approaches at the head of which is Dlaba, pretender to the palace of Mogrook. Know also that Sultan Slary lies dead at an assassin's hand. The assassin, a man of this very town, has been caught and executed but Sultan Slary is still dead. Unless we obtain swift aid, things will go evil for all of us, including yourself."

"I have no interest in this," said Jules.

"Sir Sorcerer, please look at this." Lhacan held up a small bottle and then quickly put it away. "We had the fortune to intercept your father's slave and the provisions and to substitute for that bottle of wine one which contained a rather serious poison. In fact, without antidote, you will be dead within another two hours. If you have pains now, you will know. Further, out of the thousands of poisons you will not know what one was used and, consequently, will be unable to use any antidote at this late hour save the right one, for I know enough of poisons to understand that an antidote can also kill."

"Thaugor!" said Jules.

"Precis—" began Forga and then abruptly checked himself.

"Now, Sir Sorcerer, we can sit here and watch you writhe yourself into the hell to which you are consigned or we can repair to the palace and revive Sultan Slary before news of his death spreads through the town and brings disaster upon us all."

Two sat down and eyed Jules. Indolently, Lhacan spread a circle of powder about them and then he, too, seated himself.

"You can have no counterspell for this, we are assured," said Lhacan. "Do you die or does Sultan Slary come to life again?"

JULES TURNED and left them. It was true that he had begun to feel weak but in his existing mental state he had paid no heed to it. He groped down into his laboratory and avidly seized upon the volumes bequeathed by Achmed. Fluttering the pages under toxicology he could find nothing which would answer his case. He snatched at the great book itself and hastily began to examine it.

One formula stared at him and one alone which offered surcease: Revivification. Time and again he passed it by and time and again returned to it.

Finally he read it. The formula for the potion consisted of two pages of ingredients and directions and elaborated upon the caution of using it.

"This," had written Achmed, "is one of the few spells which cannot be undone. When the formula is injected under the right armpit of the necromancer and the incantation pronounced, some small danger lies in the path of the sorcerer for he has taken a responsibility onto himself for the destiny track of the revived corpse. While some necromancers specialize in this, it is to be noted that their own fate patterns have been deranged."

Thaugor, cursed Jules. Thaugor, under the license of giving those three politicians personal aid, had constructed his own downfall. For if he ordered their vanishment or seizement, they would be protected by the circle and could very easily drop and break that damnable bottle!

If only Meg were here!

If only he had really had a course at the university!

Thaugor!

Was he going to sit here and let Thaugor get the better of him?

And was he going to die while that contract with His Satanic Majesty was in force?

Was he going to abandon the whole field to Thaugor and Crebo and tamely give up his soul to the Devil knew what?

Jules was angry and Jules, as Achmed, displayed the fact.

It is, however, one of the misfortunes of emotions that they accelerate the reaction of chemicals on the system and before many minutes had fled, the print began to blur before his gaze and it was only with great will that he tried to keep on reading.

Dazedly he struggled halfway up the stairs and there collapsed into the ready arms of Slingo.

"Make . . . up the formula," whispered Jules. "And be quick. Thaugor . . . will get what . . . is coming to him . . . for this."

Lhacan administered just enough of the antidote to keep Jules alive and Slingo hastily began to throw the formula together as he had so often assisted Achmed in others. But Slingo considered himself a very intelligent familiar and, glancing sideways to see if he was noticed midway through the revivification formula, he quickly shifted a thick handful of pages and then, rejoicing at his own ingeniousness and foreseeing no trouble whatever for the eventual effect on Jules, he finished off in triumph.

The formula was injected. The incantation was pronounced. Jules Riley was fed the remainder of the antidote and the things were done.

"I must go masked," said Jules dully.

"We will have a mule litter meet you in the grove," said Lhacan. "You don't mind if my two dear friends remain with their dirks at your back, I hope."

"Not at all," said Jules.

"Very well. We will soon be at the palace."

Slingo grinned as much of a grin as a familiar can manage and strutted after.

V.

THE PALACE, which had been built for much greater things than the rule of a small province like Mogrook, sprawled languidly in the heat, hiding within itself a hundred rooms which had never been opened, a thousand bodies which had been buried unannounced and in the night beneath its mosaic, ten thousand sly secrets of tangled politics, and a million million noble insects of many, many kinds.

From one's first entrance through the mighty bronze gates where stood lazy sentinels, the way led swiftly into confusion. The high-domed halls imperceptibly became wandering verandas; the great rooms with their beautifully painted ceilings and fantastically tiled floors were so intricately doored that to leave one was to be lost; gardens, with musically splashing fountains, bloomed quietly in rainbows of spray; courtyards, turreted on all corners, were alive with the graceful whiteness of doves and sleepy with lolling soldiery and slumbering horses. One could have walked here for hours without gaining the least impression that anything portentous had or would happen, for the white-drifted sky was untroubled and the ancient stone was mellow and the inhabitants seemed to be intent, in the main, upon rest, not preparation for strife.

No one looked twice at the masked mule litter or the white robed men who rode about it after the sentries had been satisfied at the outer gate.

Jules peered cautiously forth a few times as they went deeper into the place. More and more he felt like a trapped hare. He was ill with the after effects of the poison but even to his now clouded senses the future possibilities of this rashness were in highlights. He knew that anyone like Lhacan or Forga or Erga would realize the folly of letting him live after this, for that would be to incur the wrath for themselves as well as their wizard when the D. E. M. O. N. S. got final word about it. And, supposing he made his escape from this political trinity, then there was Thaugor, and Thaugor and all the rest of the D. E. M. O. N. S. would be immediately at work with various efficacious spells aimed at the final demise of one Achmed el Abd Mahmud. Life from here on would not be worth the living.

Well, he thought suddenly, it wasn't worth the living anyway with Meg married to one Crebo in a far away province. If that didn't drive him to eventual suicide, he was much in error. No, he'd go on with this and go out and have it all over.

They halted in a court which was grown about with great fronded trees and the three politicians dismounted and gave over their gorgeously caparisoned white mounts to a lackey and then handed Jules down from the litter and drew a white cloak over him. Slingo had dissolved in smoke sometime after their leaving Jules' house and was still invisible, though a sudden flight of pigeons betokened that he walked in advance of them.

THEY WENT in through an arch into the dimness of an antechamber and proceeded deeper into the moist coolness of the structure until they were on the threshold of a huge hall. This place had a floor which was a series of polished steps all easing down toward the lowest part of the room, the center, where a fountain played with the shafts of sunlight which filtered through the roof. Several young women, unveiled and in clothing built more of imagination than texture, were engaged in a game of trying to throw a huge silver ball across the fountain. They fled, their veils streaming behind them, on the approach of the men. An enormous old dame, swathed all about with muslin until she looked like a cheese wrapped up for the market, waddled toward them.

"Ah, so it is Lhacan!" she cried. "And where is His Potency, may I ask? No one has seen him the entire morning!"

"The sultan will be about in a few hours, I suppose," said Lhacan. "His head was aching when I saw him earlier and he pleaded indisposition."

"Ah," said the old woman. "Between us, Lhacan, I think he'll lose that contest with the grape growers before he is much older. The more he drinks the more they plant and the more they plant the more he drinks."

"Away with you, Mother of Calamity," said Forga. "We have here a learned physician to cure the Sultan."

"Is he so learned he must mask his face?" said the woman. "Or have you three hatched some plot which has to do with poison?"

"Away," said Lhacan, disliking any touch upon truth.

Cackling to herself the old woman stood out from their path.

"Who was that?" said Jules.

"His mother, Leba," said Erga. "She puts her beak into anything and poisons it whether it be man, wine or business."

"Evidently," said Jules, "His Potency likes that sort of thing about him."

They had entered a high, black door and were mounting a twisting stair

into a huge tower. At the top of this they came upon a great, hairy beast of a man who stood with giant hands wrapped about a scimitar. The hair on the naked body bristled and the small red eyes scorched at sight of them and then, when recognition was made, he drew aside.

The room spread out before them where His Potency made his quarters. It was some two hundred feet square and contained very little furniture, for it was ornament enough in its own construction. The floor, deeply black, mirrored everything. The walls were a long row of stained glass arches. The bed was an affair which would have accommodated three or four elephants for it was more of a silken, conical tent with a softly pillowed floor than an actual bed. There, a sheet covering his face, lay His Potency, Slary, Sultan of Mogrook.

"After this is over," said Jules, "I am to have safe conduct out of this palace."

"Oh, certainly," said Lhacan, his beard hiding the evil of his grin.

"Very well," said Jules. "I'll blow the place down if you don't keep that promise!"

Wishing he had used some of the time he had spent mourning Meg in application to Achmed's books so that just that could have been done, Jules approached the bed.

SLINGO became smoke and then Slingo and dropped a curtain so as to mask the sight of the three politicians. Slingo walked across the soft expanse and threw back the sheet to disclose Sultan Slary's corpse.

There was no doubt about the sultan being dead. He had been for hours and hours on a hot day. Normally he was a huge man, corpulent but of a large enough frame to give fat the appearance of power. His face had been strong-featured enough to resist the inroads of flesh and so he was able to give off an austere and even savage aspect. Heat had now increased the corpulence. Sultan Slary was not in very good condition. In fact, there was a distinct odor in the air. Slingo pulled the corpse by one leg and brought it closer to Jules who averted his nose.

"Must have died last night, early," said Jules, trying to take a professional air onto himself.

Slingo parted the shirt—a difficult task since it was held closed by congealed blood—and laid bare the ugly poniard wound.

"If I bring him back to life," said Jules to Slingo, "he'll probably repay me with his man Friday's scimitar. If I don't, his ministers will take care of me. Have you anything to suggest?" He disliked asking Slingo but Jules felt so rocky and even ill that the effect of the corpse was to further incapacitate him.

"Do not worry," said Slingo. "Sultan not give trouble."

Jules reached over to examine the wound and wondered if it would vanish when he brought the sultan back to life.

"What is the chant I use?" said Jules. He was weaker than he had thought and sank down unsteadily.

"From the bowels of Hell
Resdo bano
I raise you back
Resdo bano
For here you'll dwell
Resdo bano
Until doom's crack.
SKELMA!"

Jules touched the bloated, blue hand of Sultan Slary and chanted weakly:

"From the bowls of Hell—"

A few seconds later there was a writhing something in smoke above the body and two eyes were blazing at Jules from the swirling white mist.

"Who calls?"

"I call," said Jules wearily.

"You accept his destiny?" roared the voice.

"What else?" said Jules.

There was a thundering blast and the whole room shook and a rent appeared in the floor. Then the white smoke began to vanish, wisp by wisp and, presently, all was quiet once more and the rupture of the masonry was healed.

Sultan Slary grunted and a drool of saliva ran out of the side of his gaping mouth. The eyes rolled under the lids and then the lids opened to reveal a pair of glazed orbs which fastened, out of focus, upon Jules.

Jules looked at Slingo and Slingo grinned.

The eyes rolled from one to the other and then held steady upon Jules. But if Jules expected to see a wholly restored man and the vanishment of all signs of death, he was in error. Sultan Slary, it was true, looked much less like a corpse for corpses do not move. Further, the wound lost some of its aspect and became merely a scarlet scar. But this was no more than a corpse, animated. On could feel the lack in it and if one had a nose he could certainly sense the fact.

"Maybe . . . maybe he'll get better after a while," said Jules to Slingo.

The eyes rolled around some more and then a hand came up and rubbed at the bloated face. An animal grunt and a belch came out of it.

The three ministers, over their fright at all the sound, thrust back the curtain now and stood beside the bed in respectful attitudes.

"Your potency," said Lhacan.

Sultan Slary eyed Lhacan a moment and then put his stare back upon Jules.

"Gespa!" cried Lhacan.

The huge guard, grinning with relief to see some life in his sultan, came lumbering forward, scimitar glittering.

"Gespa," said Lhacan, "behead this sorcerer instantly! And seize that familiar before he can dissolve!"

Jules leaped back and away. He was entirely too weak from the poison to put up much of a fight even though in his leap he carried the sword of Erga with him before Forga could keep its singing length in his scabbard by a hasty grab.

Leaping up in the bad footing of the pillows, keeping the curved blade's point glittering in their faces, Jules cried, "You'll have to take me first! Slingo, bring the spell of destruction of Page 960 of the big book and bring it swiftly!"

Slingo dissolved on the instant. The mighty Gespa aimed a terrific blow with his scimitar which was easily ducked. Gespa struggled not to go too far off balance with the rest of the swing but Jules, sick or not, was a very active individual who had paid good attention to his gymnasium routines at Beymouth. Jules lunged in and came quickly back, drawing a spout of blood from the great guard's throat base.

Erga was screaming through a window to men-at-arms below and trumpets were beginning to split ears throughout the palace.

Lhacan and Forga, though better politicians than swordsmen, engaged blades at once with the battling wizard and fought him back across the bed toward the other side of the room, Jules backing in an attempt to make the door.

Forga thought he saw an opening and lunged. But flowing djellabas, while they suited chicanery, did not suit swordplay and Forga stumbled midway en route to Jules' heart. Jules' glittering blade did not take off Forga's head. It merely slit his throat in passing.

Footsteps thundered behind Jules but he could not turn for Lhacan was pressing him hard and Lhacan was too good a soldier to overlook any opening.

Jules was suddenly engulfed by a thrown cloak and was born, smothering, to the floor.

"Kill him!" screamed Lhacan.

"Kill him!" wailed Erga.

Jules was being held down by so many soldiers that he knew it would be a second or two before a sword could be thrust into him. If only he had really studied at the University of the Unholy Names!

And where was Slingo?

"HOLD!" bellowed a mighty voice. "Unloose him!"

THE BONINESS of knees was relieved from Jules and the cloak was dragged away from him. He sat near the top of the stairs, surrounded by men-at-arms. But at this moment he was getting scant attention for they were all drawn up smartly and were facing the bed.

Sultan Slary was walking forward toward the group. He was not a pleasant sight with his black-smeared shirt and bloated face. A horror of his

appearance could be felt to creep through the men-at-arms, though it is doubtful if their battle-filled noses could have detected the corpse odor.

Sultan Slary paid no heed to anyone. His glazed eyes were fixed upon Jules and to Jules he advanced, stepping over the bloody corpse of Forga but not so swell but that he stumbled.

Sultan Slary put out his hands and laid them, bloated and blue, upon Jules' shoulders. Sultan Slary dragged Jules to him and patted Jules on the head. Sultan Slary smiled and drooled and looked pleased.

"My friend," said Sultan Slary. "My very best friend. The friend I love best in all this world. A prince among men! What is your name?"

"Ju—Achmed el Abd Mahmud," said Jules, revolted by this thing.

Sultan Slary kissed him on the cheek and then held him off to admire him. "Achmed el Abd Mahmud! What a beautiful name! What a wonderful name! What a fitting name for so wonderful a person! Lhacan!"

"Y-yes, Your Potency!"

"Lhacan, this is my very best friend in the world, Achmed el Abd Mahmud. Forga is fortunately dead so there will be no trouble in making Achmed el Abd Mahmud my wazeer. Lhacan, show Achmed el Abd Mahmud to the wardrobes and clothe him well. Have him bathed with scented soaps. Give him everything in the palace he wants. He is my very best friend and my very greatest adviser. Touch one hair upon his head, any of you, and you shall die horribly for it. Ah, ah, ah!" And he again dragged Jules to his bloated breast and kissed his cheek. "My friend. My wonderful, wonderful friend! You cannot leave my side for I would die in pining for you. Do not let him leave this palace for I would be miserable without him. My friend!"

The men-at-arms looked uneasily to Lhacan but Lhacan, knowing that an attack was soon pending from the pretender, Dlaba, even now on his way, knowing that any changed circumstance in the palace would bring about the revolt of Mogrook, had to bow in acquiescence.

And as they led Jules away with all courtly graces, Sultan Slary called out, "My friend, if they are not courteous tell me and we'll have their heads! And come back within two hours for I shall be dying of loneliness for your company and sage counsel."

IN ANOTHER PART of the palace Jules was handed into the care of lackeys, men whose tongues Sultan Slary had prudently had cut out for they were for his own personal services. They went about the business of bathing Jules and setting out rich robes for him and paid no heed when he sought to send them away so that he could rest.

At last they were gone and had closed the shutters behind them, leaving the room cool and dark. Jules collapsed upon a bed and tried to shake off the horror of Slary's embrace as well as fathom what had caused this thing.

Some time later a puff of smoke appeared and congealed into Slingo who stood eying his master with terror.

"You," said Jules. "You waited long enough to come back here!"

"I . . . I—"

"And where is the book I ordered you to bring?"

"O Master! Achmed O Master! Disaster is great! Where stood the home and office, nothing but hole! All gone!"

Jules started up and then sank down again. "Thaugor. He's used this as license to do that and—he'll have the sanction of the D. E. M. O. N. S." Wearily he turned to face the wall for he wondered now that he had lived this long.

His mind wandered over the problem and then returned to Slary. He rolled to face Slingo again:

"The Sultan Slary suddenly conceived a great liking for me. Maybe you can tell me why."

Slingo put aside his nervousness long enough to grin. He puffed up with importance.

"I save."

"And how?"

"Mix one half revivification formula and one half only. Mix 'How Win Friends Influence People' formula whole thing. Mix injection chant."

"Slingo! That's horrible! You fool, Sultan Slary is only one half alive and he loves me! And other people won't be affected at all because of only half a chant! Slingo, get that book. We must—" He groaned and sank back for it came to him then that the book was no more.

And gradually, if they saw no magical defenses arise, the D. E. M. O. N. S. would assume it was safe to attack this place and put him to the death they supposed he deserved!

No Meg. No profession. Oh, why hadn't he let that bottle of wine do its worst!

VI.

The ensuing week was not a happy one for Jules Riley for the events which were making hung about him like a smoky shroud and obscured all sight of sunlight, and the company he was forced to keep was somewhat distasteful. On the one hand, Sultan Slary insisted on Jules' proximity during every waking moment and on the other, the officers and politicians shunned Jules, both from terror of a sorcerer and jealousy of a new favorite.

It was odd that they should be jealous of Jules for, at the same time, they showed no disposition for wanting to be near the sultan and should have been grateful to Jules for keeping His Potency from giving them any attention. Sultan Slary had, in the past, been ruthless in his exertion of the powers of state and it had always been true that if he saw something in a man he did not like, Slary kept the head as a souvenir. It was all, of course, in the name of justice, for justice was here defined as the likes and dislikes of a potentate and just now the potentate was not in full possession of faculties and so seemed slightly deficient in mercy. This reasoning was not, however, shared by Erga or Lhacan.

Nearly any time Jules ventured away from the side of Slary, or out of his own quarters, he was certain to find Erga mincing down a corridor or across a hall, waving a perfumed handkerchief before his delicately patrician nose as though the odor of the slain also clung to Jules. Erga, when the sultan was not nigh, was wholly impervious to bows, then nods and, finally, snubs, though after passing, Jules was conscious of Erga's eyes upon his back and that the eyes promised evil things.

Lhacan, inflexibly military and firm of bearing, became distant to both Jules and the sultan, a fact which the latter did not at all remark. If Slary could think that deeply, he possibly attributed it to the fact that Lhacan was occupied with the difficulties of finding levies to withstand the oncoming army of Dlaba, now only a few days' distant. Jules, however, knew. Jules had nearly been knocked off steps by Lhacan and there had been wild words.

Lhacan had cried, in a voice which sought to pin Jules up against a plaster wall and stab him through and through, "You miserable cheat! You did not do your job as we intended. There is trickery here! Change the state of His Potency or watch yourself!"

"I did not ask to come here!" Jules had flared, hand on dirk. "I didn't ask to get smothered in your stinking political garbage! Unbar the gates of this place to me and you'll see how fast you are rid of me!"

"Now that you know our forces? To let you leave the sultan in his present condition? To give you free rein to run blatting to Dlaba and inform him how best to attack; nay, to pour black wizardry into that attack? I give you very little time, sorcerer, to make His Potency whole again."

"You'd have to give me eternity. It was not my planning that he is as he is!"

And two days later, when the sultan had called Lhacan to account for troops numbers and dispositions, Lhacan saw how far he had drifted from favoritism.

Slary was puzzling stupidly over reports which a spy had brought concerning the numbers of Dlaba and was making small way with them. For some time his huge head was bowed close to the parchment scraps and his blue hands held or traced the figures. Finally the sultan threw the packet down the long table to where Jules was trying to eat breakfast. The packet did not go the whole board but halted close to Lhacan who sat with service untouched. Lhacan picked them up and started to read, but Slary's displeased roar chopped the action.

"Give them to Sir Achmed!" bawled Slary, spraying half-chewed bread. "You'd read them but you'd lie to me! Give them to Sir Achmed, I say!"

Lhacan gave the thing at the top of the board a disgusted appraisal and then passed the packet to Jules.

"It says he has nine hundred cavalry," said Jules. "A siege train of good proportions is manned by excellent troops. He has two thousand infantry. A considerable force, Your Potency."

"Ah! It will take more than the sniveling priests of Mawlah or the help of that god himself to repulse them!" said Slary. "And how many troops have we, Lhacan?" This last in a supercilious voice.

"Five hundred cavalry and fifteen hundred foot," said Lhacan. "But I have tried to tell you again and again that we find it impossible to gain new levies. Mogrook is strained to the last serviceable soldier."

"Bah, you incompetent bungler! We could have ten thousand foot if we called for them properly. Lhacan, you are losing your abilities as you grow old. In fact, I am becoming considerably displeased with you. *Guard! Have up three mounts and an escort!* I shall show you how to recruit, my white-hearted general!"

Shortly after, with Sultan Slary at its head and Jules to his right and Lhacan to his left, a column rode out of the palace gates and into the town of Falla. Sunlight struck upon their polished helmets and shields and hung in the gold-worked leather of the saddles and bridles.

Jules, knowing the futility of trying to mask himself against recognition by Thaugor, was steel-capped and white-cloaked like an officer. He looked upright and handsome and certainly, on the face of it, did not seem calculated to inspire the terror which he did, for people at some distance would point and there would be a whisper of wizard and then the streets would be deserted.

Slary missed the cause of the lack of cheering throngs and, as they wound between the walls of the houses, filling the way completely, Slary's anger began to mount.

"Captain!" he bawled to the chief of his bodyguard, "Clean out that tavern!"

Three troopers were instantly detached to breast their armored mounts against the closed doorway and smash through. There were sounds of pain and terror within the place and then a wretched crowd came tumbling forth to cower on the pavement before the troop.

Slary glanced over them and pointed a finger in rapid succession to five young men. These troopers instantly cut out of the throng, despite the protests of some of the old men and young women. The five were lined into the column which then moved on through the remainder—which had to be nimble to avoid being ridden down.

"That's the way to recruit!" snarled Slary to Lhacan. "Captain! Burst into that home! You'll see, Lhacan, that we can have an army twice as numerous as that fool Dlaba's!"

THE TROOP, two hours later, having already collected some three hundred youths, rode into the huge square which was dominated by the minaret. Here the place was carpeted with kneeling people while a priest wailed a prayer. Here stood the image of the strongest god known to these people, Mawlah, a brute-faced, glaring giant of brass who was depicted in the act of stuffing children into his mouth with his eighteen hands. Jules looked with

revulsion at the image and it occurred to him now, for the first time, that minarets in this land did not mean Allah. The philosophy of the place ended with demons and brass idols which thrived on fear.

Whatever the power of the mighty Mawlah, he seemed to be surfeited with his tasty food for he made no movement whatever to halt the proceedings among his faithful worshipers. The troop went through the mob with steel-spiked hoofs, treading many under, and yanked eighty-three young men out of it to send them reeling into the ranks of their unlucky fellows already captive.

The sight amused Slary and, as they rode by, he threw a handful of gold before the idol for which the priest immediately scrambled.

Another hour was spent tearing open homes and swelling the mob of recruits and then when the captain protested that their train grew heavy with spoil, they turned once more toward the palace.

They had come to the inner gate and were about to go through it to the palace road when they were barred from it by a crowd of elderly men, obviously the council of Falla.

"Oh Mighty Slary!" said the white-bearded elder, holding a branch of the palm as a token of peace.

"What business you have!" bawled Slary, "we'll attend it in the palace!"

"O Merciful Slary," said the elder, "we fear that would be much too late." He glanced over his shoulder to see if he was still attended by his fellow councilmen. "We are not averse to your recruiting your forces for we know we all stand in need of protection. But give to us a few of these whose new wives and families will starve in their absence or whose parents who are dependent upon them will not be left in want. We say nothing about the increase of taxes or the necessity of this recruiting, but we must pray that you give us back these few."

"Out of the way!" said Slary. "For all I know, you are in league with Dlaba, even though you'll find him a far worse ruler than I!"

Somewhere on the wall above the gate sounded the soft release of a tautly wound crossbow and a moment later Slary's hand was pinned to the saddle by the arrow. With a roar of rage he wrested the shaft loose, tore it out of his hand and then broke it. In paralyzed horror, the old men in the street stared at that hand. It was not bleeding.

The sniper on the wall sought to fire again but the bows of the guard had flashed a moment before and now, resembling more a pinchushion in strenuous use than a man, the marksman came tumbling down from the parapet to crunch upon the pavement.

"You formed this trap!" bawled Slary to the aged council. "Captain! Carve them down!"

The shout of protest which Jules loosened went unheard in the clatter of equipment as the guard charged, swords swinging, steel-spiked hoofs striking down. Jules hid his eyes but he could not hide his ears. Above it all resounded Slary's pleased bellows.

SHYING at the scent and sight of blood and scarcely knowing where to set down a hoof, Jules' mount carried him on the heels of the troop and when he looked again he found that of their recruits none remained, save a few of those who had been arrowed in the back while trying to escape. A few of the cavalry were riding wide and cutting down some of those who were still visible. Just inside the city gate a young man with a feathered shaft standing out from his side and his arm hanging by a tendon was suddenly covered by a young woman who sought, by stretching her own arms and body, to protect him from further harm. Some of the arrows which went into her pinned her to the body.

One ancient remained, spared because Slary had hauled him up by the collar to spit into his face.

"Go tell them," cried Sultan Slary, "that Mogrook will furnish three thousand cavalry and infantry by tomorrow and have them armed and waiting at the palace gate or the town of Falla and the province all about will be laid in charred ruin by the best of my Stodda mercenaries!"

The old one was flung to the pavement where he began to run before he was scarcely off all fours.

Slary laughed and ranged back alongside Jules. "My friend," said the sultan in surprise, "you are so very pale! Is it this cursed sun?"

"No," said Jules and then, brave through disgust, "it is this cursed murdering!"

"I . . . what was that?" said Slary.

"You had no reason to do all this!" said Jules heatedly. "You've killed good men and for what? You'll have Mogrook, all Mogrook, under Dlaba's standard by this morning's work. You've won the battle for him without his striking with so much as a stick!"

Slary had reined up and the troopers, now that they were surrounded by fields and had nothing more to encourage their sport, paused about them. Lhacan was grinning with a delight he tried hard to hide for it was obvious that the favorite had taken a step from which there could be no withdrawing.

"Sir Achmed," said Slary. "I don't understand—"

"You have a lot to understand!" said Jules, hotter than before, his dark eyes flaming and his thin nostrils flaring like those of a battle-mad stallion. "You have never heard of justice or mercy. You know nothing of statesmanship except that the scepter of a sultan is a license to kill! You drain your state to a point where the first invader can level it and then revile it because it does not protect you! Go on back to your palace, you corpse! Whether I die for it or not, I am traveling this life alone after this hour!"

Slary looked blankly at Jules. "I . . . I don't understand you. I . . . I have the reputation for being a mild ruler. I have even considered my people as more than slaves by permitting them to own slaves and that is a merciful measure, one which Dlaba would not continue. You . . . you called me a 'corpse'?"

Lhacan was ready to roll out of his saddle with glee but, by exerting all his will, remained still.

"Yes, I called you a corpse!" said Jules. "I brought you back from a place where you were going to roast ten times ten thousand eons, but I did not bring back a man, I brought a monster! You have your political friends to thank. I did not ask to be brought here."

Much of this was evidently past Slary's understanding for he grasped only upon one phase of it. "You mean you are a . . . a wizard? A necromancer?"

"You knew that!" cried Jules.

Slary's horse fidgeted and then obeyed the rein and came nearer Jules' mount. Slary peered into Jules' eyes. "But you are so young—so good to look upon. I cannot believe it!"

"It's true, right enough," boomed Lhacan. "He is a sorcerer, a necromancer, in league with all the demons of the universe. In the breath of an instant he could turn you to stone and make of you a writhing pillar of flame!"

"A . . . a sorcerer!" said Slary, his bloated face incredulous.

No man of the troop had known this and the Stodda mercenaries, though fiends in battle, shied back and gave swift ground until an empty space fully thirty yards in radius stood about Jules, Slary and Lhacan.

"He could bring down death upon us all in an instant," said Lhacan, gripping a small bag of mystery Thaugor had given him for protection again secondary spells.

"A sorcerer!" said Slary. And then his huge face lit up and his glazed eyes fastened upon Jules. He slobbered with pleasure. "A sorcerer! Oh, my friend Achmed! And I did not know! And I thought we had need of recruits! What a reception we shall give Dlaba! What a reception!"

Seizing the rein of Jules' mount and cackling a nerve-racking laugh, Sultan Slary spurred in the direction of the palace.

VII.

AT TEN the day after, a foam-splashed horseman came careening through the palace gates, white cloak still streaming as he leaped from his saddle and raced up the steps and through the yawning palace door.

He checked his rush as he burst upon the throne room and hastily bowed to the golden chair far across the polished floor.

"Your Potency! The army of the pretender files through the pass not two hours march away!"

"Ho-ho!" roared Sultan Slary. "Well done, messenger! Lhacan, begin the disposition of forces on the outer wall and have ready the molten lead! Ah, my dear friend Achmed," he continued as he leaped up and strode toward the entrance, "we shall soon be giving Dlaba the fright of his life!"

Achmed had been realizing full well that the missing half of the second charm had been the influencing part of it, for he did not seem to be able to get any intelligence home to His Potency. Pacing behind him now, in a voice which would not go unheard, Jules spoke again what he had been saying for hours:

"I tell you I am not a sorcerer! I know nothing of sorcery! Unless you intend to be bottled up in this place with scant provisions, you had better retreat now! I can do *nothing!*"

"Ho-ho! He fears the wrath of the D. E. M. O. N. S.," said Slary. "My good friend, your own life, when at pawn, will convince you of your abilities, I am certain. No, I cannot bear to part with you now. And I am looking forward with great interest to this coming contest."

They mounted the ramp which curved about a tower and ended upon the outer battlement. Crossbowmen were racing along in squads to disperse under their officers and take post at the wide-angle slots which covered the ground before the main gate. Artillerymen struggled with the setting of their catapults. Fires were roaring under the onslaught of bellowed air and lead was beginning to melt in the great iron pots cleverly hung in the embrasures where they could be tipped with little more than their own weight. Below a body of Stodda cavalry galloped forth to reconnoiter the approaching enemy.

In the din of trumpets and battledrums, Slary said, "You see, we must at least make a warlike show or Dlaba, the fool, will suspect! Ho-ho! What

a surprise he will get!" Slary slapped at his side with mirth but missed and barked his hand upon stone. A great gout of flesh came off, unbleeding, and dangled on the rough corner. "What a surprise he'll get!" repeated Slary, completing the slap.

A swarthy-faced Stodda captain came rushing up with a salute and bow. "Your Potency! Any local troops we had have deserted! They have been gone since daylight! We now number less than three hundred fighting men, cavalry included!"

"Worry not!" boomed Slary. "We have a wizard here who will give our dear Dlaba a mighty shock indeed. Carry on with your preparations, captain!"

"You have to listen to me," said Jules in a level voice. "I am no sorcerer, I cannot protect you. Retreat while you have time!"

"And miss so much fun?" said the sultan. "I should say not! Go prepare your potions, wizardly friend. Review your spells. Poor Dlaba!"

JULES LEFT HIM and, followed by two troopers at a discreet and even fearful distance, went back down the ramp and across the inner yard to the palace doors. There was a horse standing there, saddled and bridled with lance in stirrup. Why, Jules asked himself, didn't he mount and ride while there was still time? But as he approached the horse, walking slowly so as not to excite the suspicion of his guards, it was as though he had run into a slowly resisting wall which made walking harder and harder until he was fully stopped, some yards short. There was no marching onward!

He heard a voice, full of sly guile, whisper, "Do you take upon yourself the Destiny of Slary?"

Jules shivered and turned his back upon the mount. The great doors beckoned coolly. Prepare his spells! And he had no spells. And as for Slary's Destiny—

With Meg gone, with this corpse for a companion and murderous Stodda troopers all about, Jules had only one means left. He would take sword in hand and die with the rest of these misguided gentlemen upon the battlements, cut down by overwhelming odds. Slary's Destiny must certainly be death and that Destiny alone could he share.

There was a stir at the battlement gate and he turned to see two sentries leap forth and cross pikes to bar the way of a young horseman, evidently a nobleman from the appearance of his scintillant accouterments and the glittering jewels in his flowing cloak. The rider was masked by a cowl which was edged with silver diamonds, blazing in the sunlight.

Jules was too far away to hear more than the clamorous challenge and the clash of crossing pikes for the answer of this horseman must have been low.

Abruptly the two sentries, though untouched, flew apart and crashed into either side of the thick gate tunnel to slump down senseless from the invisible blow.

Unperturbed, the horseman rode through, glancing about as though in search of someone. A squad of men dashed forward to avenge the strangely brutal treatment of the sentries and seemed, all at once, to run into an invisible barrier, for there was a crash as their arms met it and another as their helmets rolled and bodies clatteringly fell.

The horseman barely glanced at them and rode deeper into the courtyard. Jules was halted halfway up the palace steps, hoping but not believing.

"Achmed!" cried the voice which had made him quiver with pleasure since the first time he had heard it.

Mistress Meg Zidan spurred forward and drew sharp rein to throw herself out of saddle and into Jules' arms.

For a long series of heartbeats they said nothing but just stood there, arms in arms, thankfully, oblivious of the sentries who had now come around and the squad which now began to pick itself dazedly out of the dust.

Meg kissed him and then, on second thought, kissed him again before she pulled back so that she could see him.

"Achmed!" she cried. "How is this? You are dressed like a soldier! What need have you of steel cap and mail vest?"

He wanted to tell her that he was not Achmed at all, that he was in dreadful trouble—

"And I have been wondering since I heard in town that you were here," she sped on, "how you could be so careless as to frequent a palace! The D. E. M. O. N. S. won't like this. Their vengeance will be very swift! What has happened?"

"I am not Achmed el Abd Mahmud," said Jules. "This is something which I tried to find courage to tell you before but I was afraid you would leave me and have nothing to do with me—"

"My poor darling!" said Meg. "Someone has taken away your memory!" Her green eyes suddenly went hot and she threw back her cowl with a furious gesture, letting the sun flame in her hair. "Tell me who it was! Tell me!"

"I am telling you truth. Achmed changed places with me in my world and I was forced to come to his dimension—"

"Tell me what has caused you to forget things!" cried Meg. "Oh, some villain is going to get his heart hacked out for this! Yes, and I'll make him eat it without salt! I'll feed him to the vultures chunk by chunk and spit his soul on a red hot rod! I'll burn out his eyes with hot needles and stuff asps down his throat! Tell me, Achmed! Ligdo bano, skelma trano, SLINGO!"

In a moment Slingo was congealed and bowing on the steps before her, terrified of her present mood, for she seemed so tall and brilliant at that moment that an army would have halted, trembling at sight of her.

"Slingo, you stupid wretch! I should drill your skull and stuff a starving rat into the hole! What have you allowed to happen to Achmed?"

Slingo stuttered and shivered and squirmed. "Noth-nothing, Mistress Ziden! N-n-nothing!"

"You are lying!" And her golden boot lashed sharply out to send him rolling disastrously down the steps to the very bottom where he hid his face in the dust and moaned piteously for mercy.

"Slingo knows nothing," said Jules. "I am Jules Riley, not Achmed el Abd Mahmud. I tell you this at the risk of losing you but it is true. I know nothing of sorcery or necromancy. Thaugor blasted my laboratory and with it went my last possible contact with magic. He tricked me into coming here and bringing the dead sultan to life and now we are under attack and I cannot leave, having accepted Sultan Slary's Destiny."

"Oh, my poor baby," said Meg, tears upon her cheeks. "Something horrible has happened. More horrible than that, I know. You know me?"

"I know you," said Jules Riley, in a low, sincere voice, "and what is more than that, I love you with all my heart."

"That," said Meg with sudden decision, "is all that I wanted to hear. This Thaugor has caused it and Thaugor shall pay. I came because I was worried—"

"What about Crebo, your husband?" said Jules anxiously. "You . . . you have to go back? To leave here again?"

"Crebo?" said Meg with a sharp little laugh and then a brief sigh. "Ah, yes, Crebo. Poor fellow," she added, conversationally, "he went to all the expense of sending me to the University, went to all the trouble of securing himself against the spells of other wizards and then—"

"Yes?" said Jules.

"Well," said Meg, "it was quite unfortunate. Sad, too. We were married in the name of Mawlah, that brass thing, you know, and as we were walking away from the high priest and past the idol, one of Mawlah's arms fell off and struck poor Crebo on the head. Killed him, of course." She looked guilelessly at Jules. "It was very sad."

Jules had been, of late, in such a disconsolate state of nerve tension that there was much excuse now for his breaking forth in a low peal of delighted laughter and once he had begun laughing, he found it nearly impossible to stop. The men-at-arms who had gathered at a respectful distance, looked at him with silly uncertainty and their expressions made Jules laugh the harder. Slingo was managing an apologetic titter from the dust, though Slingo had no idea what the joke might be and had no sense of humor, anyway. The sight of Slingo set Jules off again.

Worried, Meg took Jules by the arm and shook him. He choked off. Then, in sudden realization, cried, "We have to get out of here. An army is going to arrive to besiege this place any minute!"

"You took Slary's Destiny," said Meg.

"Yes."

"Then we can't leave, for if Slary dies, you die."

"Then," said Jules, sober now, "you must get back on that horse and get out of here, for if you stay you'll die with the rest of us. And even if you use your magic, you cannot stave off the eventual wrath of the D. E. M. O. N. S."

His was the turn to be swift and strong for he swept her into his arms and placed her in the saddle. "Go. I won't let you in for this danger."

"But . . . but is it true that you have forgotten your magic?"

"I never knew any magic and what I have told you, all of it, is true. I have a sword and I won't go tamely down! Now *ride* before it is too late!"

"You are right about the D. E. M. O. N. S.," said Meg. "You are equally right about staying. I must tighten this cinch before I go." She dismounted beside him and busied herself with the cinch. Suddenly there was a puff of white smoke which drifted lazily where the horse had been. "Now, isn't that provoking?" said Meg, looking innocently at Jules. "And if that trumpeter up there is screaming what I think he is screaming, it is too late now to walk."

"You're a fool!" raged Jules. "Bring back that horse and get out of here!"

"I've forgotten the spell," said Meg.

He seized her by the hand and pulled her inside the palace doors, trying to hurry her toward the other side of the vast building from where she could make her escape. But Meg pulled free and, fist clenched on either hip, faced him.

"You are an ungrateful yellow dog!" cried Meg. "Here I ride hundreds of leagues to find you and you are so unmannerly that you try to kick me out before I have been here ten minutes! So there! You know what I think of you!"

"Meg," he pleaded. "I can't have you killed."

Radiating defiance, she stood her ground. "If you get killed," she cried, "for what do you think I would live? A few months ago I thought I could find it possible to live without you but during the time we have been apart I have known that it is not. And since I know that you also love me, it will take more demons and cats from hell than you can conjure to drive me from your side, death or no death. Now! Try and drag me another foot!"

"You know that this *is* certain death?"

"Yes."

"You know that the D. E. M. O. N. S. will sooner or later take this up and that you will be involved?"

"Yes."

"And," he continued relentlessly, "you still want to stay here?"

Suddenly she wilted and buried her face in his cloak collar, clutching him strongly. "Oh, yes," she whispered. "I love you, love you, love you!"

FOR SECONDS PAST the palace walls had been alive with shouts and now a clash of weapons preceded the re-entrance of the Stodda cavalry. The great gates crashed shut and the bars boomed into place. Excited commands went

ripping along the battlements and a sibilant lethality of arrows became an undertone to all else. Shafts, overshooting the walls, began to clink into the tiles of the palace itself.

With Meg gripping his wrist, Jules raced up the ramp to overlook the scene of the plain. The yellow-brown sod was made nearly invisible by the glittering horde of warriors which swarmed there. Far back were orderly ranks of infantry and cavalry grouped about a man on a black horse. Nearer was infantry still in motion in seemingly endless lines which bent to engulf the palace and anchor the wings upon the sheer cliffs to the north and south. Nearer still, directly under the walls, was a large body of heavy cavalry, glittering with steel armor of horses and men and fluttering with black cloaks and the black-starred penons of Dlaba, moving so rapidly to try to locate a possibly forgotten postern that arrow fire was almost ineffective. Out of a draw, three hundred yards away, poured a body of pioneers bearing a battering-ram which was equipped with a snarling, iron wolf's head at its end. On a ridge which commanded the palace at a distance of six hundred yards, Dlaba's siege train was setting itself together and appeared now like a line of hungry gibbets, dark against the brilliant blue of the sky.

The heavy cavalry swerved away and thundered out of crossbow range. The infantry, now a hundred yards away, threw itself into firing order and began to spray the battlements with arrows to cover the approach of the pioneers with their battering-ram.

Along the battlement, a Stodda mercenary now and then cried out and fell back. One, near Jules, tumbled away from the slot, both hands wrapped about the half visible shaft of the arrow in his throat, and bumped against Jules.

The sight terrified Jules, not because he recoiled at death but because, suddenly, he knew that all he would have said was:

"From the bowels of Hell
Resdo bano
I raise you back
Resdo bano
For here you'll dwell
Resdo bano
Until doom's crack.
SKELMA!"

In vain he tried to stop the scorch of it through his mind. In vain.

The crossbowman struggled up, seized again upon his weapon and went steadily on with his firing. But there was glazed death in his sighting eye, a death which his crossbow communicated with horrible accuracy to the attacking force.

Jules shuddered and turned away.

"So . . . so you did take that . . . potion," said Meg, her eyes wide with fear for him. "Oh, darling! No wonder—"

"I won't do it again," said Jules, his breathing labored. "I won't!"

"My poor darling— Here, I'll stop this!"

"No!" cried Jules. "Say nothing! So long as you do not participate you will incur no wrath. I have decided that. Slingo! Oh, there. Slingo, you will make your way instantly by the routes you know to the counsel of the D. E. M. O. N. S. and you will tell him that Mistress Meg Zidan had nothing to do—"

"Move a step," said Meg with a pleasant smile which made Slingo's brow bead with sweat, "and you are no more, Slingo."

Slingo was in a dither of indecision. He cowered down under a rampart and blinked.

WITH A CRASH the battering-ram, its men protected down by a ceiling of shields held by infantry, rocked the hinges of the gate. Hissing, a caldron of molten lead tipped its brilliant contents down in a long waterfall and men screamed in agony below. The arrow fire of the covering infantry doubled and the men at the caldrons reeled back, two of them tripping on the inner ledge and pitching over to plummet into the courtyard.

Thunder again from the battering-ram, and then once more. A cheer resounded from the pioneers as they dropped their huge weapon and went leaping into the protection of the gate while infantry poured through the breach. A crash of swords against swords sounded in the courtyard. In full charge, a thousand men dashed from the plain in upon the wall.

Jules, drawing his sword, started to rush down the ramp and give aid to the defenders, but he had not gone more than halfway when he heard a chanting cry above him:

"By blood of evil,
By curse of Scoregal,
Conjur, conjur,
Monster, monster,
Turn army away,
Make death their stay!
BYLONSKYLOR!"

And with the last word there was a trembling of the earth, and some of the walls of the palace gave off broken gouts of plaster, and stones fell from the battlements. In a blaze of fire which, even in sunlight, the eyes could not stand, a thing appeared in the courtyard—a thing which was huge and pawed the pavement and sent out roaring gusts of flame as it dashed upon the charging infantry.

From the gate, men scrambled back with screams of terror. The infantry on the plain halted in full charge and stood in frozen attitudes. The pioneers sped over their battering-ram in full flight and stampeded the until-now orderly lines. The cavalry horses reared in terror and then, taking away all control, raced through the waiting ranks of reinforcements and put them into panicked flight. Within seconds, all was movement away from the pal-

ace and it was not orderly. A rout had made frightened hares out of a well-organized military machine.

The thing scooped up stragglers and then, seeing much game underfoot, halted and began to feast.

"Into shades
Thou wilt return
To come again
And glory earn!
ROLYKSNOLYB!"

There was a rending of the earth and a great gap showed where the thing had stood. In a little while the gap had healed.

Meg looked at Jules defiantly. "Well," she said. "I guess I win the argument."

"But—the D. E. M. O. N. S.!"

"I like to win arguments," said Meg stubbornly.

VIII.

With a guard lantern guttering on the floor of a turret arsenal and sending its rays unsteadily to make eerie shadows upon the circular walls, Jules and Meg partook of cold roast partridge and a bottle of wine, eating without speaking, ears tuned to any sound which might come to them. Slingo and Baleesh were on the battlements, keeping a private watch of their own.

Both Meg and Jules knew that they were close to the end, for the hour

had advanced to midnight and a full moon shone upon the earth, a coincidence which they knew must be attended by action if the D. E. M. O. N. S. were ever to show a hand in this—and Thaugor, they knew, would see to that with all the speed in assembling the dark host his black minions could manage.

Now and then the couple smiled at each other as though seeking to reassure the other that all was well, each knowing that nothing was. Their hearts were too full for idle conversation, and so passed the silent minutes.

Soldiers' boots resounded on the battlement and drew near, went by and then returned to the lantern light. A captain with the glazed eyes of a corpse and the blue pallor of the dead, whose mail bore the marks of the sword which had killed him, looked at Jules.

"Where is his potency?"

"In the palace, I think," said Jules. "He said he would return here when he had slept."

"The garrison is reduced to fifteen of us," said the captain. "We—had to stay. I do not know why. The others, and all the people of the palace even to the sultan's mother, have slipped out under a flag and are now with the enemy."

Meg leaped up, and her shadow splashed higher upon the yellow wall behind her. "Ligdo bano, skelma trano. Baleesh!"

Baleesh crept in through the door and bowed; then, seeing the light in the eyes of his lady, began to tremble and mutter incoherent apologies.

"They deserted and you did not come!"

"Mistress, I cannot see."

"You lie!" cried Meg.

"Mistress, I— If I die, it will be the end of me! O mistress! Release us from this place. Release us!"

"Why did you not come and tell me?"

"Because"—he hung his head and wriggled miserably—"the plain is so still. I knew the desertion of the guard would not affect us, and I knew I did not have to tell you that the . . . the— Must I say it?"

"The D. E. M. O. N. S.," prompted Meg.

"Yes! I knew you would know they are there. Hundreds of them, ringing this place all about! Mistress, release us! In minutes it may be too late!"

"Ligdo, bano, skelma trano. *Slingo!*" said Meg.

Slingo congealed beside the lantern and groveled.

"You two," said Meg, "had already deserted us."

"No, no," they both whimpered.

"You were miles away when I called you back just now!" cried Meg.

"The black ones—" moaned Slingo. "If we are caught, it will be the end. Release me, O Master Achmed! Release me! If I stay, I will be killed!"

Meg threw the dregs of her wine glass at his face. "Heed, crow carrion! You will not leave our sight now! Jules! Where are you going?"

"This battle, I have said a dozen times, is my fault." He stood in the doorway buckling a sword about himself. "This is my last chance to get back at Thaugor. He is out there somewhere. When he is dead and they have me, you'll not be troubled. Vanish yourself and get through the lines. They won't bother to search for you!"

She sped after him. "Baleesh! Hold him back. You, captain, seize him! He is mad!"

Slingo was too far gone to help Jules, and the captain and the other familiar managed to block his exit through the postern.

Before Meg could utter a word, however, their attention was distracted to the plain. Through the bars of the small postern they saw something huge and black begin to rise up out of the ridge and sweep upward and forward, taking gradual but indistinct form. It was lit by points of fire. Baleesh averted his face while the captain expressionlessly studied to discover the identity of the thing.

"By blood of evil,
By curse of Scoregal,
Conjur, conjur,
Monster, monster,
Grapple that beast
And show him least!
BYLONSKYLOR!"

Meg finished the sign she made with her hand, and while the earth began to shake, she snatched hold of Jules and led him back across the courtyard.

Slary was upon the steps of the palace, staring up at the thing which he could see over the ramparts, so great was it. About him stood fourteen men-at-arms, withdrawn in terror from the battlements. The moonlight's colorless beams upon this group did not make them less grisly, for they were dead, all of them, but not dead.

There was a rising roar, and the earth, which had trembled before, now shook until stones fell out of the battlements, and a palace tower came crashing down and through the roofs. Although Jules could see that Meg was speaking as she reached into the air and extracted a wand, he could hear no word she said above this savage din. He looked toward the direction of the sound and saw two great heads rear, engulfed in flame, and then sway savagely down out of sight. Another tower fell with a shower of debris, and the pavement rocked so that those in the group were thrown down upon it.

Jules tried to steady himself, and then, with a shock, found that his hands were pushing empty air. He was dizzy with whirling, and could not breathe for the speed to which he was accelerating. With a shock which knocked what air he had out of him, he came again to rest.

He was lying upon a road over which great trees spread and made patterns of shadow. It was very quiet, though even at this distance from the

palace one could feel a tremor in the earth. Jules sat up and looked about him.

Fifteen men-at-arms and Sultan Slary were lying nearby, also beginning to stir and look about them. Meg was sitting upon a milestone which read:

Falla, Mogrook Province
Three Leagues

The tremor in the earth ceased suddenly, and Jules looked quickly at Meg to move toward her and take her hand.

"It's over back there?" said Jules.

Meg nodded.

How white she looked, and how cold was her hand! He peered up into her face and saw, for the first time, something like fear in her eyes. Her hand was trembling.

"And it is over here, too?" said Jules.

"I made to transport us much farther than this," said Meg.

"And?"

She said:

"By those intelligences by which I command—" She reached out and grasped at the air. But no wand came into her hand.

Her hand trembled anew. "Ligdo bano. Skelma trano. *Baleesh! Slingo!*"

No smoke rolled near them. There was no sign of the familiars.

Jules squeezed her hand. "Come. We will walk as far as we can."

He glanced around him and saw the fifteen soldiers and Slary grinning stupidly and fondly at him, and a sudden anger with them made him begin to cry, "Go back to—" He broke off. They looked so contrite and so anxious. He began again. "Follow us."

THEY ALL SMILED and got up and fell into a squad formation with the captain and Slary at the head. Slary put his arm around Jules' shoulder. "Whatever you say, my good friend Achmed. For such a friend we would do anything! We may have lost a little tonight, but do not think that matters. We are still your friends. Your very, very dear friends, Achmed." He beamed, his bloated face not too pleasant to look upon in the shadowy moonlight. "We are with you forever!"

Achmed shrugged off the arm. Exhausted as he was from nerve tension the odor of Slary was nearly too much for him. Hastily he moved a few paces ahead to walk with Meg.

"One spell which was not broken," said Jules ruefully.

"They wouldn't break that spell. Nothing they know can break it," replied Meg.

In silence then, under the gently sighing trees, they picked their way along the rocky, moon-bathed road.

After a walk of nearly a league they came to a ruined outpost fort which had once been great when Mogrook had been great, but now had been allowed to fall into a vine-split ruin which retained no shape of its former self save for one lonely tower which still stood guard.

"You cannot walk much farther," said Jules.

"I can walk," said Meg.

He stopped her and bent to touch her golden boot. The rocks had cut through the delicate fabric in several places, and there was a small, dark dampness warm upon her ankle.

"We stop there," said Jules.

"I can keep going!"

"We stop there," said Jules. "They will find us before the night is over. Why prolong it?"

They stepped off the road and walked over the ancient, weed-grown pavement toward the turret, but when at last they stood at its foot they found that the walls, in falling, had completely blocked the way. Denied this, Jules gazed about and saw a grove of trees on a nearby slope to which he pointed.

They made their way across the field and were quite close before they saw a white gleam under the canopied branches. Jules halted for a moment, and then, with a shrug, led on.

The place was the military cemetery of the fortress, and the regular white slabs marked the resting places of the bones of the thousands who had died in defense of the place during two centuries.

The sight made both Slary and the troopers vaguely uncomfortable, for they stood among the softly gleaming stones in dull and troubled silence, as though here was something they should know but yet did not know, a fact which slipped away just at the edge of the reach of their minds. Jules found them staring at him with questioning frowns. He shuddered and turned his back upon them, to sink down by the edge of a vault which, by inscription, contained a general whose deeds had gone wholly unremembered.

MEG TIREDLY dropped into the soft grass beside him and looked pensively out across the valley where wound the moonlit road by which they had come and by which would soon come men and things seeking them.

"Jules," she said quietly.

"Yes?" And then, somewhat startled, he moved so that he could put his arm about her and look into her face.

"Achmed," she said, still quietly.

"Jules," he corrected.

Meg looked for a little time at him, and then said, "Tell me about it again."

"There's little to tell. I did not want to do what had been set out for me, though I was going through with it anyway. Achmed, here, did not want to stay here and do what he was supposed to do, according to the note

he left me. By means he had discovered, he changed places with me. I could not get back. After I first saw you, I— Well, I didn't want to go back."

"Jules—Riley," she repeated slowly. "From somewhere. Jules—"

"Yes?"

"You were afraid I would leave you if I knew?"

"Yes."

"Jules. I sensed something that first night. A change in you—in Achmed. A change to something better. I thought it was because I had fallen more deeply in love with you—Achmed—because we were to part so soon. Achmed was weak in many ways. And strong in many others. He did not have as much physical courage as I would have liked him to have had. You —seem to be strong in both. That was the mystery of the packet, then?"

"Yes."

"And that is the mystery of why I fell so suddenly and deeply in love with you—when I had only felt a—well, motherly sort of instinct, I guess, for Achmed. I used to tease him with kisses because it plagued him, not because— Jules?"

"Yes?"

"Kiss me."

A little later he looked down the road and found it still empty. But that was no guarantee of security, for there were things in the air he could not see which might take word back.

"Jules—"

"Yes?"

"You must think I am a very bad woman."

"I wouldn't love you if I did."

"You trust me, then?"

"Certainly."

She gave a little purring sound and laid her head more deeply upon his shoulder.

To sit here calmly, Jules thought, was pleasant. And then, suddenly, he told himself that he was sitting here waiting to be killed, waiting for the woman he loved to be killed. He stood up and scanned the sky and then the field and road.

Nervously, as though charged by a force he could not recognize, he left Meg and paced down the seemingly endless lines of tombstones, the men at arms and Slary hanging patiently upon his heels, looking uncertainly at these graves, grinning uncertainly when Jules looked at the men-at-arms.

JULES SWORE to himself. Black arts! How he hated the very thought of them! How he despised the evil and sorrow which went with them! The unclean bestiality of this dimension, and all its cruel, grasping lords and sorcerers!

He came back to stand by Meg.

"Can you think of anything?" he said.

"I know," replied Meg, "that I would do a great deal if I had any of my power back. But that's wiped out forever!"

"Any power I had," said Jules, "did not lie—"

There was a shuddering in the earth, and the air was foul with acrid odor, and a sly voice behind Jules said, "The conversation you had a little while ago, Jules Riley, was most interesting."

Jules whirled, and Meg started to her knees. The clerkish-looking gentleman in the orange silk cape was smiling pleasantly and rubbing his hands together.

"You!" said Jules, remembering back.

"Yes, of course," said the clerkish-looking gentleman. "We met before, when there was a slight question of forgery, I believe. I—ah—had the pleasure of negotiating for his satanic majesty the indenture of the soul of one Achmed el Abd Mahmud. I do hope I am not intruding?"

Jules and Meg looked steadily at him.

"Well, then," he continued, "when my little air sprites brought me word of what you said a while ago, I was, of course, much interested, for I am quite zealous in the service of his satanic majesty. Another event took place this evening which was confirmed by your conversation. There was a little trouble about it for a while, but I think it will soon be straightened out."

"What other matter?" said Jules steadily.

"Why, when the D. E. M. O. N. S. were calling up all sorts of scouts and monsters and turning things this way and that, a certain Prince Draun—"

"Oh!" said Meg, paling.

"Yes, yes, the same that was captured and held in chains by Achmed el Abd Mahmud. Prince Draun of the Black Souls had some interesting information to deliver. It seems that Achmed el Abd Mahmud was to be found, now, in dimension theta lambda psi, masquerading under the name of Jules Riley, in the body of Jules Riley. Prince Draun was empowered and commissioned, and the body of Jules Riley is now in the Beymouth mortuary—"

"You can't!" cried Jules.

"I had nothing to say about it," said the clerkish gentleman smoothly. "To continue, we received, a few minutes ago, the soul of one Achmed el Abd Mahmud, and when put to the test, revealed not the slightest knowledge of the late deeds attributed to him in this dimension. Of course, it is regrettable, but we cannot restore him, have no contract for him which is binding, and so must quickly get him born into another dimension, all of which is being attended to at this moment. He will have no knowledge of his past life, but as he felt about it, that is just as well. Now, to get down to your case, Jules Riley, that forgery of the contract, of course, leaves us without a valid contract. You find yourself in difficulties, I believe."

"Well?" said Jules.

"My, my, my, how truculent. But, then, I like brave men myself. To be explicit, I am empowered to grant you full powers with which to combat

the D. E. M. O. N. S. Though you may still come off second best, you will have a chance, which is more than you have now. What was that little spell about 'From the bowels of hell—'?"

The rest of it raced through Jules' mind before he could stop it, or even stop the Skelma at the end.

THERE WAS a shaking of earth and groans all about, and the cemetery began to move with white forms while moonlight shined upon dull and rusty armor.

With an amused and self-satisfied laugh, the clerkish fellow stepped back while, from the vault beside them, a massive frame stepped forth and looked smilingly at Jules.

"My friend, I behold you!" said the grisly thing. "And look, troops! Troops, my friend! Would you have us conquer all the world for you?"

Jules shivered under the clattering hand which lay upon his shoulder and took a step backward before he could brace himself against doing so. He straightened up and looked the thing in the eye.

"Thank you. I need no help."

"Troops!" said the general. "Excellent, well-drilled troops! See, I will form them! *Trumpeter, sound assembly!*"

The ghostly strain reached eerily across the slope, and things came from the shadows and began to form in ranks. Armor clinked and rattled. And as men passed him they smiled fondly upon him while they took their posts.

"You see?" said the clerkly fellow. "You see what a little power can do? Now I shall give you all the power in the dark arts you can possibly possess. In return, of course, there is the little matter of the contract—"

"You say the other is void?" said Jules.

"Yes."

"Then my graduation from the University of the Unholy Names was void?"

"Well—yes."

"Then my entrance into the D. E. M. O. N. S. was void!"

"Now, now, now," laughed the clerkish fellow quietly. "It is not as easy as that. You repeated their oath, and they still have a perfect right to kill you. And even though you did not take the oath as Jules Riley and that oath is invalid, you still have angered them and they will still kill you. So these powers and the contract—"

"Sir," said Jules, "I want none of your powers, and I want nothing of your contract. And if you conjured these troops to beguile me, then take them back, for I want none of them!"

"The fellow is mad!" said the clerkish gentleman.

"I may be mad, I may be a fool; but, sir, I am not buying my life with your gold. Now get gone!" And he laid a hand upon his sword hilt so that the clerkish fellow hastily stepped back and began to speak anew. But

Jules was letting him say nothing. "I have had quite enough of your trickery, your evil, your black arts. If I am going to die, I die as a man—"

"Think of the girl, Meg," pleaded the clerkish fellow. "We have a contract on her!"

Jules faltered, but only for a moment. "All right, then, without giving me any powers, you can bring here a contract on me for my signature, *but* you must release her contract back to her!"

"No, Jules!" cried Meg.

"We won't do that!" howled the clerkish fellow. "We'll have you both! I shall send messengers to the D. E. M. O. N. S. and bring them here with all speed! Repent now or die!"

The sweep of Jules' sword cut the frog which held the orange cape at the throat and it sprang apart. The clerkish fellow gripped it and opened his mouth to cry out the spell which would vanish him, but he found it difficult to speak, for Jules had him by the throat and had lifted him some inches off the ground.

"So you won't do that!" said Jules. "Let's hear the chant that will take you away! Go on, say it! Say it loud!"

The fellow gurgled and spluttered and gasped for he was turned a bright purple.

A PIECE OF SKIN had fallen out of the cloak and Jules beckoned Meg to hand it to him, which she quickly did, though she was inspired with horror at what Jules was doing, well knowing the consequences which would follow.

Jules looked at it and saw it was a blank contract which had been intended for himself. He plucked a pen and some blood for ink out of the clerkly gentleman and handed them to Meg.

"Write," said Jules, "as follows! 'In return for my own safety and release, I hereby, in the authority invested in me, do consider and grant as completely served and thereby canceled any and all contracts held for Megaera Zidan.' Got it?"

"Yes," said Meg weakly. "But—"

"Now, you, sign it!" said Jules savagely, holding the clerkly gentleman close to the marble slab where the contract lay.

The clerkly gentleman signed avidly, if shakily, and Jules fixed his seal thereto.

"Now," said Jules, pocketing the document, "you are going to take back all these specters. All of them! And you are going to take back that spell power with them!"

"B-bu . . . Dest—"

"Take them!"

"I . . . I will!"

Jules released him enough for him to utter the command and then looked toward the field. Drunkenly now the troops came back, armor slowly

clanking. The earth trembled and they disappeared. And fifteen corpses and that of Slary lay sprawled in limp attitudes, shivering now and then until they were finally still, moonlight softly playing down upon their open and marble eyes.

"Now go!" said Jules.

The clerkly gentleman spun as he was thrown away. At a safe distance he danced up and down and gibbered.

"I'll bring them here. You can't escape! I'll bring them." And he was gone.

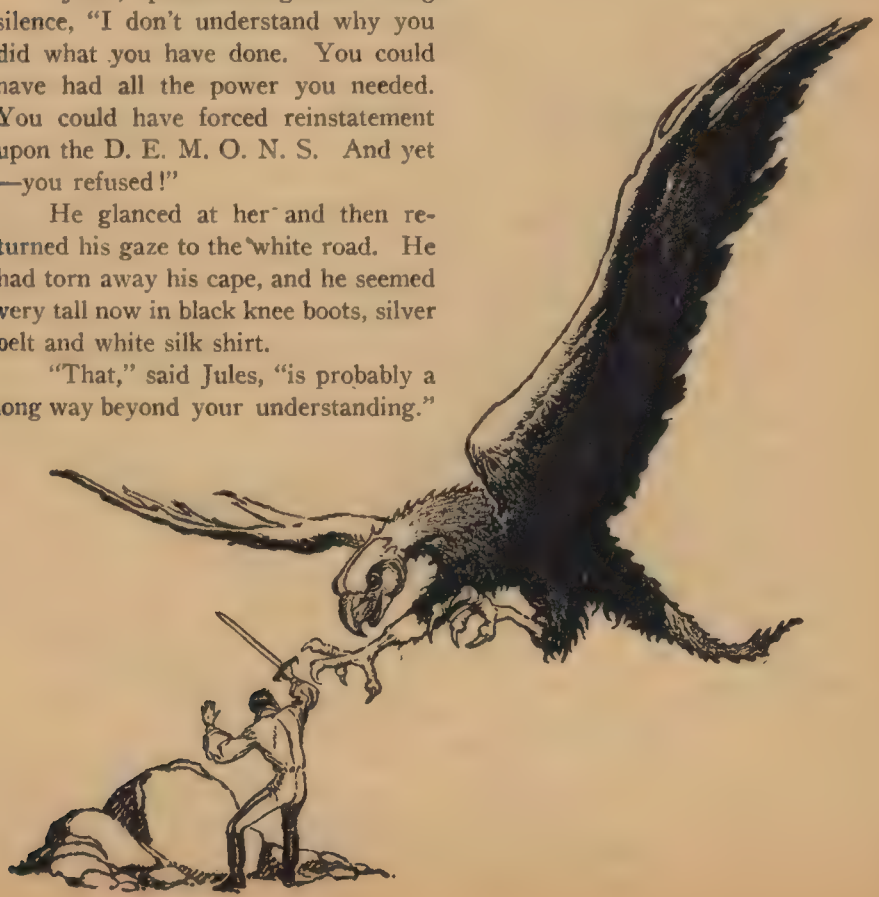
IX.

SURCHARGED with the violence of his interview with the clerkly gentleman, and somehow unchained from the dread which had assailed him, Jules paced back and forth upon the slope and watched the dwindling white road below. His sword was naked in his hand, and from time to time he vigorously swept the air with it to keep his arm warm.

"Jules," pleaded Meg after a long silence, "I don't understand why you did what you have done. You could have had all the power you needed. You could have forced reinstatement upon the D. E. M. O. N. S. And yet —you refused!"

He glanced at her and then returned his gaze to the white road. He had torn away his cape, and he seemed very tall now in black knee boots, silver belt and white silk shirt.

"That," said Jules, "is probably a long way beyond your understanding."



She was reproved by his tone. "But to throw away everything—"

"I threw nothing away but treachery. I have foresworn nothing but lies. And no man was ever the richer for having those two as companions."

"I think you should have accepted!" said Meg. "What can you do alone? This is mad arrogance to think that slender bit of steel can do aught against the tremendous power the D. E. M. O. N. S. will soon bring against us."

"Not against *us*," said Jules. "You are no member of theirs. Somewhere you have friends. Probably you are rich since Crebo's death. You still have a chance."

"You—are so brutal and—cold and—sure."

"I am sure that I am not buying my life back again with things I hold to be wrong," said Jules. "Twice you have sought to stave off this fate for me. But this fate is inevitable. To accept anything our visitor could have given would be to accept but another postponement. I am sick of putting it off and putting it off again. Here I stand, here I wait, and here I'll go down fighting."

"That," said Meg, "is more dramatic than sensible."

"Go across these fields while you can still escape," he said.

"I refuse to leave you! Even if you are a fool just now, I . . . I love you."

He sensed a change of tactics to get him to abandon his decision, and would not glance at her.

"I am staying here," said Meg.

"That is your own decision," said Jules.

"Yes, that is my own decision."

"Then," he said, coming to a stop before her, "I am glad, and by that I am stronger. What," he said, with an impatient glare at the road, "is keeping them?"

She was awed by this strength, this steel of him, by the folly of his seeking to attack, alone, such things as the D. E. M. O. N. S. would bring. She knew those better than he.

"It is not too late," she cautiously ventured, "to change your mind. You could relent—"

"Stop it!" he cried. "I have made my choice. I should have made it long ago, when first I entered this world. I should have answered with truth at the university. I should have forced the truth upon them. I should have shown you that packet when first it was received. And I should have avoided all contact with the D. E. M. O. N. S. Again, I should have let myself die rather than come to a bargain with Lhacan. And again, I should have forbidden any use of your magic in the palace. I should have stayed behind alone, to take what is meant for me. Evil will avert nothing, for it leads to further evil."

"I don't . . . don't understand!" said Meg, impatient now.

"You don't understand because there is no one in this world who could have taught you. I was never religious. I am not religious now. But I have realized the force of truth in many things, and by that force I take my stand. The great brass belly of Mawlah holds only lies. The demons of the subdimensions can deal only in sorrow and agony and grief. And then men who live by these evils live not at all but shudder themselves into their graves. I spit upon the brass of Mawlah! And the monsters and familiars! And upon the D. E. M. O. N. S.!"

"Jules!" she cried as though the sky would fall.

"Yea, Jules!" he mocked, worked down into violence of voice and pace. "I spit upon them, do you hear? They are filthy phantoms, fit pawns for pigs! I am a man, and by God, I'll die like one! Yes," he said, halting suddenly. "By God! By my own God! The God of right and truth and glory!"

"Your—God?"

"Yes, mine!" said Jules.

"That surprises you, doesn't it?" cried Jules. "Because I sweep away your demons and devils you think me without belief. Because I will no longer follow your chants, there are no prayers in me! Well, I know prayers more powerful than any spell ever named, for they are to a God who is light, not darkness, who is good, not evil!"

"You—will bring greater torture upon us both!" cried Meg. "Do not speak these blasphemies!"

"Blasphemies!" cried Jules. "Yes, you would call them blasphemies. Yes, they would enrage the highest and lowest of this black world alike. But I cry them, anyway. I fling them into the jaws of anything which will be brought here tonight. For I am sick of evil. I am sick of being a coward. And I am going to go with my God."

Meg gasped in sudden terror, and Jules, glancing down the road, saw an advancing black cloud which slowly seeped along. The D. E. M. O. N. S. had been informed. In moments they would be upon them. He flicked grass with his nimble sword and warmed his arm. There was a wild light in his eyes, there was an ecstatic fire burning within him.

"Jules!" cried Meg.

He whirled, and briefly, roughly, kissed her. And then, turning, strode down the slope to meet the first ranks of the advancing army.

"Jules!" wept Meg, gazing after him. "You will die! They will kill you! Jules!"

He did not hear her, did not look back, but kept steadily on.

His white shirt was visible in the moonlight, and the river of darkness swerved away from the road and began to flood across the plain to meet him. When he had descended to the level he stopped and waited for them, fearlessly eying the dull glitter of their striking serpents and the rusty black of their gowns.

The mass came to a halt before him, and a voice—Thaugor's—called out:

"Jules Riley! We know you and know the trickery you have employed. You are sentenced by the order. Advance and submit!"

Jules stood where he was. "I have employed no trickery. I disavow any sentence which has been passed. And as for your order, I spit upon it!"

There was a murmuring gasp at this effrontery, and faces turned to faces in anger. The mass moved a few paces nearer.

"Submit!" cried Thaugor, echoed by a hundred others.

"At the point of this sword!" said Jules. "Upon you—listen well, Thaugor—I pass the sentence of death! Come and take me!"

"What impudence is this?" cried Thaugor.

"Draw!" said Jules.

THAUGOR REACHED into the air and whisked out a magic wand. He cried strange words and waved the spender stick over Jules. Nothing happened, and Jules kept coming forward.

Thaugor snarled new words and waved again. And Jules came paces nearer. Thaugor looked to right and left, and gentlemen emblazoned with striking serpents drew their wands forth, and again Jules came forward, now within three paces of Thaugor, where he stopped.

"If you have done, sir," said Jules, "you had better draw, for when I count five I am going to run you through. One—"

Thaugor backed up and screamed an incantation. On the instant a monster leaped into view and reared high above Jules, spitting flame and thunder. When it came down, Jules pulled his point out of its throat and stepped over its body.

"Two—" said Jules.

There was a mutter in the ranks, and then the earth abruptly opened at Jules' feet. But somehow a little island remained in the center of the chasm. Jules stepped across toward Thaugor, who again backed.

"Three—"

There was a thunder of wings in the sky, and great talons stretched down to snatch Jules moonward while a mighty beak gaped to tear off his head.

Jules' sword flicked.

"Four," said Jules as the body crashed the earth and he stepped another pace toward Thaugor.

There was a drawn-out murmur in the crowd, and then, loudly, in unison, their voices rose up as one.

"Out of the pit
Above the earth
To rend and spit
ALL!
BYLORSKYLAN!"

The earth shook so that men fell on their faces, and an instant later the space which had been left by the hasty removal of the crowd from it was

filled with black and writhing shapes beyond count, shapes which were dark and clinging and sinuous, so that when they walked, black, cohesive masses hung in the air behind them. They rose in height until the very moon went out.

Jules struck and struck again, and each time his sword went through and through as though he hacked soft putty.

They were bearing in upon him, choking him, dragging him down, pressing him back toward the gaping rent in the field which stretched bottomlessly downward.

There was a shock communicated to the masses, and then they swept backward, pouring over Jules in nauseating waves as he struck at them. There sounded the hammer of hoofs and the battle cries of forgotten long agoes! And the mass was swept downward through the cleft in the field, downward and downward again, until, with a crash, the breech closed!

Looking around him, Jules saw Thaugor who, with the other wizards, stood chilled upon the field. The black gowns rippled in the moonlight as though a wind of fear had passed through them. Suddenly, with a scream of rage, Thaugor whipped forth a sharp dirk, grooved for poison and dripping with it, and lunged at Jules.

"Five!" said Jules, and then, stepping back, withdrew his darkly running sword.

The mob turned with a yelp of terror from the writhing body of Thaugor. The road was clogged and jammed with the black mass until they flooded out over the edges and floundered in culverts or spilled from bridges too thickly filled to allow them passage.

And as the wizards ran, sharp cheers soared triumphantly to the moon, and the thunder of mighty hoofs racked the plain and road as, again and again, with lowered lances and flowing plumes, a cavalcade made havoc and a final rout.

MEG was at Jules' side, looking at him in admiration and wonder. She had partaken some of his valiance, for there was a radiance to her face which had never been there before, a stateliness in her stature, and a look in her eyes very close to worship.

Jules watched the gentlemen who had helped him come trotting back to bring their great chargers to a halt in a line.

They were a strange crew, for in them were blended periods hundreds of years apart, costumes assorted from the earliest times to those not a hundred years dead. Gilded hussars, cloaked Spaniards, troopers bearing the cross of hospitalers or the three lions of Richard. And from them exuded a luminosity which made the field all about them glow brightly. And from them came a magnetic flow of force and power and mightiness which was warming to feel.

One last horseman, having reluctantly given over the chase and slaughter, came galloping up and reined beside Jules. He eased out of his saddle,

his armor clanking, and pulled the plumed helmet from his head.

He had a heavy and long mustache and brightly fierce eyes, and there was energy and strength in every inch of his squat body. He came to Jules with a hint of swagger, but there was a smile upon his face, a swashbuckling and triumphant smile.

"Jules Riley?" he said. "I am Sir Launcelot, captain of these bravoes. Up there you'll see several others of my friends and fighting men fit to associate with us. When you called us, we came."

"Called?" said Jules.

"Certainly, old fellow, certainly. For your bravery was call enough, even if you did not have a command upon us with your courage and your faith. You stand for the powers of righteousness, and we are the gentlemen of the Cross. We have been aching to invade here for some time, but—well, we had first to be called, for the gap was wide and you helped us bridge it. We would have brought the full regiment, but this job was none so big."

"Thank you," said Jules.

"Oh, don't thank us," said Sir Launcelot. "We are in your debt. And now—"

Another had swung from his horse, a powerful, handsome man, gray-headed, but with all the strength and exuberance of youth.

"Your majesty," said Sir Launcelot, "Jules Riley. Kneel, Jules Riley."

Jules knelt and glanced up at the luminous warrior king and knew that he beheld Arthur.

The king drew his sword, and with a prayer laid it upon Jules' head. Then: "Rise, Sir Jules, soldier and knight."

Jules rose.

"If you ever have need of us again," said Arthur, reaching into a pouch and bringing forth a cross, "touch this and call, and we will come. Oh, verily, we will come, for my gentlemen love such a fight."

Jules took the cross, which glowed brightly and warmly in his hand.

Arthur swung into his saddle, and then Launcelot mounted. The whole line raised swords as one man and gave a shout.

"What shall I do now?" Jules cried to Sir Launcelot.

"Do?" replied the knight. "Do? Listen to him! Sir Jules, you and this lady who loves you are king and queen of all this land, since nothing can stand against you. We salute you! Go and bring light with sword and voice. Go and rule!"

A trumpet blared and the cavalcade wheeled, and with a final shout of farewell which rose mightily from their hundred throats, they charged upward and outward and were gone.

Jules looked at Meg. It was a little difficult to speak just then, for something seemed to be choking him, just as it was a little difficult to see because a mist had gotten in front of his eyes.

"You see—beloved?" he managed.

THE END.

THE ROAD BEYOND

by NORMAN A. DANIELS

● It was hard, fighting up against the Stream—back along the Road Beyond to Here—

Illustrated by F. Kramer

THERE were still smoking ruins after the first raid of the day and the thick columns of it seemed to be a magnet for enemy pilots. The second wave was coming over—fast. The roar of bombs, two or three miles away, reverberated through the air. The "take cover" signal was whining with a queer sort of stuttering haste and people raced for shelter.

Paul Chivers didn't run with the others. He simply ground his face deep into the dirt and shivered. Paul Chivers was a clean-cut, likely-looking young man. He was no more than twenty-four and his ancestry was among England's best. His father, for instance, was a member of the House of

Lords and he was now serving with the U-Boat Watch Patrols. His brother was probably rushing from some airport in a fast Spitfire to intercept the bombers. His two sisters were working in a hospital. One wing of it had been demolished only a matter of forty-eight hours before, but they were still there, still working, and sleeping only when sheer exhaustion claimed them.

Not so with Paul Chivers. He was the peculiar member of his family. He'd always been possessed of a ghastly, overwhelming fear of violence. As the hum of enemy motors came closer, he dug frantically, tearing his nails and his flesh; trying to create an individual bombproof shelter for himself. He didn't trust the regular Anderson shelters. He'd seen one struck by a demolition bomb—a direct hit. There had not been much left to describe, but enough to turn Paul's stomach inside out.

There was a pounding of feet as those caught outside were racing for shelters. Paul Chivers risked a quick look at the sky. There they were—as tiny as bees, but their stingers packed death and destruction. Then he heard the first screech of a bomb hurtling down. It would land close by. He whimpered and tears came out of his eyes to make mud out of the dirt caked below them.

The whole world seemed to quiver. The explosion filled his stomach to its very bottom. He could actually taste that explosion. It made his brain reel and his eardrums were all but shattered. He looked up. The bomb had fallen about a quarter of a mile away. What had once been a modest dwelling was now a mass of tangled lumber. Paul Chivers got to his feet somehow. This particular section was untenable. Every second brought him closer and closer to death. The sky was alive with those little mites now, diving and ducking as their exhausts left trailing smoke to pattern their crazy maneuvers.

Paul Chivers began to run—like a maniac. He stumbled and fell over debris several times, but he paid no attention to his hurts. All he wanted was some place deep in the earth where those bombs couldn't reach—where the horrible concussion would be dulled. A terrific explosion let go behind him. He didn't turn to look. The next bomb might fall directly on his head. He sought the first shelter possible—the cellar of a house that had been smashed to kindling. He dove headlong through one of the cellar windows, landed on the cold, dank earth and lay there, covering his eyes with his crooked arm and shivering.

A very light touch on the shoulder made him jump. He twisted his neck, looked up and in the dim light which filtered through what was left of the house, he saw a girl.

She was no more than nine—possibly ten—for she was rather thin and small. Her dress had once been pink and polka-dotted. There was blood on it now. She was fair-haired, blue-eyed.

"Hello," she said cheerfully. "Rather a good shelter we have, don't you think?"

Paul Chivers sat up. "What's good about it and who are you?"

"I'm Jessica. I used to live in this house once. My mom and daddy were —home when the bomb hit. They'd sent me to the store."

Chivers said, "Oh," in a very low voice. He saw a piece of burlap nearby and spread it on the dirt floor beside

him. "Sit down, Jessica. As soon as the raid is over, I'll take you somewhere. You have people, haven't you?"

Jessica sat down and drew her abbreviated skirt as closely as possible around those pipestem legs of hers. "I don't know. Joey was a pilot. Daddy hadn't heard from him in weeks. I guess maybe he's dead."

"Now see here," Paul said in a mildly reproving voice. "You're not acting at all like a nice girl. Don't you even feel sorry for those people of yours?"

Jessica smiled. "Not much, really. They don't have to worry about bombs any more like we do. Listen—I think they've cleared out."

She started to arise, but Paul grabbed her wrist. "Wait here, you little fool. How can we be sure they've gone? One can never be sure. Stay here—I want you to stay here."

"Are you afraid to be alone?" Jessica asked with the bluntness of childhood.

Paul looked a bit startled. "Me, afraid? No—oh no, I'm not afraid. Just careful is all."

Jessica heard something else. The ever-increasing din of a dive bomber. Paul suddenly remembered that there was an electric power plant only a matter of two or three blocks away. The dive bomber was trying to get it. The screeching noise grew louder and louder and with it rose Paul's terror. He clung to Jessica's hand until she winced with pain. Then it came!

The first gigantic explosion hurled them both clear across the full length of the cellar. The already wrecked structure turned from debris into slivers of wood. The brick foundation was blown out. Dirt geysered high. The other bombs hardly mattered. They were more of a curtain call, a devil's applause.

PAUL STILL held Jessica's hand tightly. There was a sudden peaceful quiet around them. It was so intense that it actually hurt. Paul looked around. They were in the country. It looked like those were the friendly blue hills of Scotland just before him. The road was winding too, like Scottish roads usually do. He felt a slight tug at his hand and looked down. It was Jessica trying to free herself of Paul's unconsciously painful grip. He let go of her, but placed a protecting hand on her shoulder.

"Jessica," he said, "do you know where we are?"

"No—I don't. How did we get out of the cellar, Paul? Who dug us from under the wreckage?"

"I don't know." Paul said and then he looked down at her quickly. "How did you know my name was Paul? I didn't tell you, did I? Of course not. Perhaps I mentioned it and didn't realize, though. I'd like to know where this road goes."

Jessica pointed straight ahead. "Why don't you ask those people? Look, there are lots of them. Don't they look funny?"

Paul squinted. There seemed to be a strange haze over everything, as if the countryside was covered with a grayish cloud. There were people too—scores of them. Some walked alone with their heads bowed. Others, particularly the young, walked just as slowly, but their heads were high and their eyes were clear.

"Pardon me," Paul touched the arm of a man who passed slowly by. "Would you mind telling me where I am?"

The man had the strangest eyes—so filled with sadness. He shook his head slowly. "I don't know. Not yet, I don't. Blimey, it wouldn't be so bad if Kate was along. I don't like this bein' alone, not 'arf I don't."

"Yes, yes, of course," Paul said. "But our location. What part of England is this?"

"I don't know," the man repeated. "They do say that there's a better road just beyond the horizon. Sunshine there and green grass and trees. I dunno, guv'nor, not for sure I don't."

He plodded by. Paul and Jessica moved off the road and watched the others pass along. There was wind in their hair and yet no wind in the atmosphere. Paul didn't like it. He began shivering again. Jessica's little hand closed around his thumb, like a baby's tiny fist will grasp at something strong and substantial.

"Paul," she said in a hushed voice. "Paul, I'm afraid."

Paul was afraid too—almost as much as when the howling death came streaking out of the sky upon him, but this kind of fear was different, somehow. A group of people came along. There were about forty of them, walking in single file and as much alone as though no one else existed. They were old too—very old—but their footsteps seemed a little more eager than those of the younger people. Their faces seemed to be flushed with excitement.

Paul stopped one of them—an old woman without teeth and whose eyes seemed embedded inches deep in her wrinkled flesh.

"Where am I going, you ask?" Her voice was querulous, as if she resented being stopped. "Who can be sure, young man? All I know is that over the horizon—just a little way from here—is the road beyond. A much better road than this one. I've been wanting to see it for years. Please—don't stop me. My strength isn't what it used to be. I want to get there before my old legs get too tired to carry me."

Paul sat down on a hillock and Jessica flung herself down at his feet. "Paul," she said, "this doesn't look like England, does it? I've never seen anything like this. And it's so quiet. Aren't there any bombers here?"

Paul's elbows dug into his ribs and he suppressed a shiver. "They'll find this place all right," he said. "Don't worry about that. They just haven't bothered here yet. No wharfs or factories or cities about. I wonder how Bertie is doing. Odd that I should think of him now when I put him so firmly out of my mind."

"Who's Bertie, Paul?"

"My brother, Jessica. My older brother. He is in the R. A. F., shooting down those devils who bomb us. We—haven't spoken for months. Not since the war began and I refused to enlist. He called me a coward then."

"Were you, Paul? Were you a coward?"

He nodded glumly. "I suppose I was and I haven't changed either. Nobody wants to die. You can't blame me, Jessica. I—well I just couldn't help myself. Well—we'd better get on. It will be dark soon and we'll be very hungry."

JESSICA PUT her hand confidently into Paul's and they walked on. Oddly enough they were traveling in an opposite direction from that taken by the other people. Paul noticed how gray their faces were. Perhaps this strange

light accounted for that. But why were they all going in one direction? What lay ahead to draw them on this way? The road beyond? That's what the man had said—and the old woman. Paul began to have a feeling that he and Jessica should join them, follow their course instead of going back. Then Paul uttered a short, derisive laugh. They were refugees—so shocked by the horror they'd seen that it had affected them this way. Of course, that was it.

Then—by going back he'd only invade the battered, wrecked towns from which these people had come. The bombers would be circling above, like vultures. No—he must travel their way. Then it was possible to enjoy this peace and quiet—such a vast contrast to the destruction and hell of London. If there was a road beyond, why not take it? Certainly it could lead to nothing worse.

"We'll put about, Jessica," he said. "We'll follow these people, eh?"

"I don't want to," Jessica said. "I don't, Paul. It's too far. I'll be tired. But I'm not hungry," she added brightly.

"Neither am I. Jessica, you're a bit of all right, did you know that? You cling to my hand because you're afraid. I'm glad you're doing that because I'm afraid, too. Not as much as before, but—well this country is so strange and these people— I don't understand them."

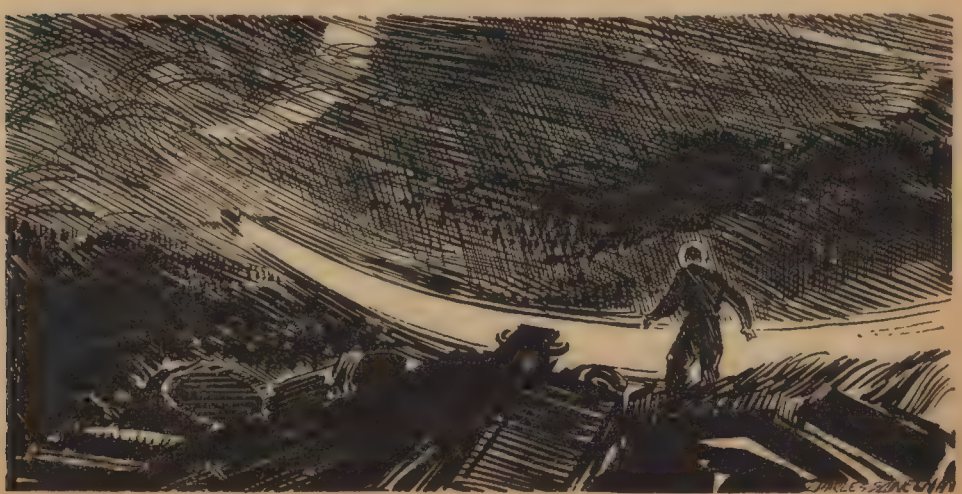
He started to turn, but Jessica restrained him. She began to cry—just a very little bit. Then she hurriedly wiped her tears.

"Paul—there's someone coming. He's waving at you. He knows you, Paul."

Paul looked and broke into a run, dragging Jessica along. "Bertie," he cried happily. "Bertie—I never expected to meet you here. Thank heavens, you're safe."

The two brothers shook hands. Paul used his left for Jessica clung to his right hand firmly.

"Hello, Paul," Bertie smiled. He wore the uniform of the R. A. F. It was soiled and dirty. So was his face and hands, but he looked happier than Paul had seen him in months. "It's just as much of a surprise to me. Strange sort of place, isn't it? Did you see the dog fight this morning—directly



over the mouth of the Thames? Knocked out two of the blighters, sent them spinning to earth. Then I got on the tail of a Messerschmitt and he went streaking for home. I kept after him. I chased him clear over to France, but he got away from me, worse luck. Then—oh believe me, Paul—I had my hands full for a little while. I ran headlong into a wave of bombers and fighters coming on over to visit us. I showed them my tail and a few tracers, too. Then something happened. I'm not sure what. I remember going into a spin and then a straight dive. The sea was below me. I kept on going and then . . . then I was here, Paul. It all happened just a few seconds ago. I can't seem to figure out how I got here. Someone fished me out, I suppose. We must be close to the channel."

Paul wet his lips. "Bertie—why are you walking in that direction—following all these other people? Why don't you turn back as Jessica and I are going to do."

"I'm not," Jessica cried. "I'm not going to turn back, Paul. I don't want to turn back."

Bertie wiped his face with a grimy sleeve and smiled. "I've got to be going now. Come along with me, Paul. You and that very lovely little lady on your arm. I'd be delighted with your company."

Paul shook his head. "No . . . no, I'm not going with you. There's nothing beyond that horizon. Just land—the same barren land that we're walking on right now. No food—no water—nothing. We'll be hungry soon. Bertie—it's kind of you to talk to me. I—suppose I was a rank coward. I should have joined up—as you did. But I couldn't. We don't know what lies beyond—just a road maybe—and starvation. Perhaps more bombers."

Bertie smiled, raised one hand and pointed straight ahead. "You're wrong, Paul. Look closely. Can't you see the blue sky—and the clouds like big, white blankets? There were blanket clouds over the sea, too. They looked just as pretty, when I started down, they didn't stop me. I went right through them. These up ahead are much more substantial. Look, Paul—carefully now."

Paul shaded his eyes. "I don't see a thing only this damnable bleakness and this gray fog."

Bertie shook his head slowly from side to side. "Then—if you don't see them—you're not ready, Paul. I've got to be going. I can't wait. Perhaps, behind the horizon, I'll find you later on, eh? But the little girl looks very tired. Perhaps she'd like to come."

Jessica pushed her face into the rough tweeds around Paul's body. Bertie patted her shoulder, took a hitch in the Sam Browne belt around his waist and trudged on. Paul started to turn away. There was something on Bertie's shoulder. He pulled it off and found that it was wet—like very damp, long grass. Then, as Bertie slowly plodded away, Paul suddenly knew what he held in his hand. It was seaweed, still wet and smelling of the salt water. He dropped it very quickly, seized Jessica's hand and began walking fast.

MORE AND MORE of these strange people passed them by, not one even looking in their direction. Jessica's skinny little legs were growing weaker. She stumbled several times and Paul barely saved her from a bad fall. It

seemed that they had walked miles—walked for hours too—yet there was no change in that dim grayness which pervaded the land. There was no sundown, no darkness, no sunlight, either.

Then they came to the foot of an incredibly steep hill. It appeared to go almost straight up. The pedestrians who streamed down it were traveling much faster than those well along the road where it was straight and level. They flitted by like ghostly shadows.

"Paul," Jessica pulled at his hand. "Paul—it's so steep. I'm sure I could not walk it because I'm getting very tired. Can't we stay here—or perhaps follow the others?"

Paul lifted her up until her eyes were on a level with his own. "I thought you didn't want to turn back, Jessica. Why not try to get over that hill? We can travel slowly."

"I'd like to," Jessica replied, "but I'm sure I can't. My legs don't want to take another step. I'm not afraid any more, Paul. Perhaps if we follow the others, we will find that the road beyond is awfully pleasant. Look at them—they can't even stop to talk. There must be something ahead—something they know about and want."

Paul lifted her to his shoulder. "We're going back," he said firmly. "I've made up my mind. We'll go back and the first thing I'll do is join up. I've been a complete fool—and the worst kind of a coward. Not like you, Jessica—brave."

"But I'm not brave," Jessica answered. "I'm terribly scared. I don't want to go back over this hill. I want to follow along with the others. Paul—what's death?"

"Death? Nobody knows, Jessica. Perhaps it's just like this experience we're going through now. We don't feel any pain. There are no more bombers. Suppose now, that all these other people we see hurrying along, are dead or dying. Perhaps when they reach the horizon, they find that the road beyond is Death. Those few seconds that remain of life are spent on this gray road. Few have the courage to turn back like we've done. That's why we must get over the top of that hill. Hang on—I'm going to try to run."

Paul did, but not very far. His own legs were growing shaky and the top of that incredibly high and steep incline seemed to be miles away yet. It came to him that the easiest thing to do would be to reverse his steps and follow the others—follow Bertie. It wouldn't be hard to catch up with him. There would be no steep hill to climb and he'd soon be out of this strange grayness which he didn't like at all, out to sunlight again.

YET SOMETHING had happened to Paul. Deep within him grew a resolve that no matter what happened, he'd reach the top of that hill. Not half so much for himself as for Jessica's sake. Once over the top the rest would be easy—just as simple as following the procession that was coming down. He plodded along. Once he almost fell and Jessica gave a cry of alarm. He couldn't carry her any farther. He set her down and she walked beside him. Perhaps seconds passed, perhaps hours or years. Paul didn't know. He had to reach the top and he could do it. Especially if he didn't have Jessica trailing along, holding him back. He possessed an inclination to sit down for a moment, lull her to sleep and then slip away. It would be so simple. Jessica was near the point of exhaustion. Even if he simply thrust

her from him and walked a little faster she'd hardly be able to follow.

Yet, even as he thought this, his hand closed tighter than ever around Jessica's small fist. They were more than halfway up now. The grayness wan't quite so bad. The fog seemed to be thinning.

"Paul . . . Paul, I can't go on." Jessica pulled at his arm. "I can't take another step. Leave me here. I'll be all right."

"You're coming along," Paul said angrily. "We can make it all right. You need courage, Jessica. Keep thinking of that—courage will give you strength."

"Yes, I know. Paul, I thought—"

"Stop talking," Paul said curtly. "Save your breath. I'm going to carry you. Hang on tightly and if I should fall—jump clear. Do you understand? Jump and go as fast as you can to the summit. Promise you will?"

"I promise. But perhaps I can walk a little longer. If you carry me, you'll become vey tired and perhaps you'll have to give up. I'll walk."

He hoisted her to his shoulder and wondered how a little slip of a girl could weigh so much. His knees buckled under him often. Once he went down on one knee, but he got to his feet again, groggy as a losing boxer in a final round. He could see the top of the hill now and there was a rosy glow beyond it. Each step became agony—each movement torture—yet he kept on. His strength was gone, but a certain doggedness kept him traveling. His breath came in snatches and sweat dripped off him.

Fifty yards more. Fifty yards and he'd be over the hill—out of the gray shadows of this valley. He had to make it.

Then Paul fell. Perhaps it was a small stone that tripped him; perhaps his muscles refused to stand up under this ghastly strain. Jessica jumped clear. She came back and knelt beside him.

"Jessica," he said. "Keep on going. Hurry! I'll make it, but you must go first. It isn't far now."

"I won't go," she answered softly. "I'll stay here with you, Paul. I don't want to go back any more, but if you were with me, I wouldn't mind so much. We could go down again, couldn't we?"

"Up! Keep going! You've got to keep going. You're the only one who can help me, Jessica. Over the top of the hill are friends. They'll come for me—lift me out of this grayness. Hurry—please hurry!"

She arose, hesitated for a moment and then trudged on. He raised his head and watched her. She avoided those who streamed over the crest of the hill, hurrying down its slope eagerly. Then, for a second, she stood squarely on the top. She turned around and waved confidently to him. He could still see her upthrust hand even after her head had disappeared on the other side of the hill.

Paul raised his own hand toward a man in the uniform of an air raid warden. The man seemed to understand. He helped Paul to his feet, put an arm about his waist and they headed back down that hill, back into the valley of gray mist and shadows. Paul wasn't afraid. He'd never be afraid again. Somewhere—on that road beyond he'd find Bertie. Bertie would know because he always knew everything. He'd wait. Elation filled Paul's heart. His steps increased in length and in speed. He threw back his head and let the

wind, which didn't even stir the dull-colored grass, whip through his hair and beat against his face.

JESSICA OPENED her eyes and looked around. She was in a hospital. There were cots placed in even rows, filling the vast room. Two doctors who had been bending over her, straightened up. One of them thrust his stethoscope back into the pocket of his white jacket.

"She'll be all right; a miracle, too. She was almost gone and then something seemed to bring her back again. The strength of childhood, I suppose. How's your friend in the next bed, doctor?"

The second surgeon shrugged. "Gone! He went out just as the little girl regained consciousness. I know him, too. Lord Chivers' youngest, and a rotter. The world is small. I examined him when the draft came. His heart was pounding like a rivet gun. I gave him two or three weeks to live. Yet—his heart was perfectly sound when they carried him in here from that cellar which the bomb struck. I know the answer. A coward—a rotten coward, that's what he is. Took some drug to get rejected in the conscription. Not like his brother Bert. I heard Bert went down, dived into the sea not far from France. There was a lad with courage. How can brothers be so dissimilar? This one—a rank, quavering coward—"

"No." Jessica tried to sit up. "No—he wasn't a coward. He was brave—ever so brave. At first he was afraid, but later on—oh you can't know. Paul was the bravest of them all. He could have reached the top of the hill if I hadn't been there to hinder him. But he sent me on. He lied to me when he knew all the time. He knew that I could get over if he helped me and he did—even though it meant he was lost himself. Don't call him a coward, do you hear me?"

The two doctors ganced at one another. The taller of them shrugged.

"Better give her a hypo. She's raving."

"Seems so," the other answered. "But how did she know the man in the next cot was Paul? We covered his face before she awakened. Nurse—oh, nurse—sterilize a needle, please."

THE END.

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THE DEVIL WE KNOW

by HENRY KUTTNER

● An ingenious little spine-crawler about a demon who accepted slavery to a man in return for a soul—which he said didn't exist anyway. So—what was his true motive—?

Illustrated by Kramer

For days the thin, imperative summons had been whispering deep in Carnevan's brain. It was voiceless and urgent, and he likened his mind to a compass needle that would swing, inevitably, toward the nearest magnetic point. It was fairly easy to focus his attention on the business of the moment, but it was, as he had found, somewhat dangerous to relax. The needle wavered and swung imperceptibly, while the soundless cry grew stronger, beating at the citadel of his consciousness.

Yet the meaning of the message remained unknown to him.

There was not the slightest question of insanity. Gerald Carnevan was as neurotic as most, and knew it. He held several degrees, and was junior partner in a flourishing New York advertising concern, contributing most of the ideas. He golfed, swam, and played a fair hand of bridge. He was thirty-seven years old, with the thin, hard face of a Puritan—which he was not—and was being blackmailed, in a mild degree, by his mistress. This he did not especially resent, for his logical mind had summed up the possibilities, arrived at a definite conclusion, and then had forgotten.

And yet he had not forgotten. In the depths of his subconscious the thought remained, and it came to Carnevan now. That, of course, might be the explanation of the—the "voice." A suppressed desire to solve the problem completely. It seemed to fit fairly well, considering Carnevan's recent engagement to Phyllis Mardrake. Phyllis, of Boston stock, would not overlook her fiancé's amours —if they were dragged out into the open. Diana, who was shameless as well as lovely, would not hesitate to do that if matters came to a head.

The compass needle quivered again, swung, and came to a straining halt. Carnevan, who was working late in his office that night, grunted angrily. On an impulse, he leaned back in his chair, tossed his cigarette out the open window, and waited.

Suppressed desires, according to the teachings of psychology, should be brought out into the open, where they could be rendered harmless. With this in mind, Carnevan smoothed all expression from his thin, harsh face and waited. He closed his eyes.

Through the window came the roaring murmur of a New York street. It faded and dimmed almost imperceptibly. Carnevan tried to analyze his sensations. His consciousness seemed inclosed in a sealed box, straining all in one direction. Light patterns faded on his closed lids as the retina adjusted itself.

Voiceless a message came into his brain. He could not understand. It was too alien—incomprehensible.

But at last words formed. A name. A name that hovered on the edge of the darkness, nebulous, inchoate. *Nefert. Nefert.*

He recognized it now. He remembered the seance last week, which he had attended with Phyllis at her request. It had been cheap, ordinary claptrap—trumpets and lights, and voices whispering. The medium held seances thrice a week, in an old brownstone near Columbus Circle. Her name was Madame Nefert—or so she claimed, though she looked Irish rather than Egyptian.

Now Carnevan knew what the voiceless command was. *Go to Madame Nefert,* it told him.

CARNEVAN opened his eyes. The room was quite unchanged. This was as he had expected. Already some vague theory had formed within his mind, germinating an annoyed anger that someone had been tampering with his most exclusive possession—his *self.* It was, he thought, hypnotism. Somehow, during the seance, Madame Nefert had managed to hypnotize him, and his curious reactions of the past week were due to post-hypnotic suggestion. It was somewhat far-fetched, but certainly not impossible.

Carnevan, as an advertising man, inevitably followed certain lines of thought. Madame Nefert would hypnotize a client. That client would return

to her, worried and not understanding what had happened, and the medium would, probably, announce that the spirits were taking a hand. When the client had been properly convinced—the first step in advertising campaigns—Madame Nefert would show her hand, whatever she had to sell.

It was the first tenet of the game. Make the customer believe he needs something. Then sell it to him.

Fair enough. Carnevan rose, lit a cigarette, and pulled on his coat. Adjusting his tie before the mirror, he examined his face closely. He seemed in perfect health, his reactions normal, and his eyes well under control.

The telephone rang sharply. Carnevan picked up the receiver.

"Hello. . . . Diana? How are you, dear?" Despite Diana's blackmailing activities, Carnevan preferred to keep matters running along smoothly, lest they grow more complicated. So he substituted "dear" for another epithet that came to his mind.

"I can't," he said at last. "I've an important call to make tonight. Now wait—I'm not turning you down! I'll put a check in the mail tonight."

This seemed satisfactory, and Carnevan hung up. Diana did not yet know of his forthcoming marriage to Phyllis. He was a little worried about how she would take the news. Phyllis, for all her glorious body, was quite stupid. At first Carnevan had found this attribute relaxing, giving him an illusory feeling of power in the moments when they were together. Now, however, Phyllis' stupidity might prove a handicap.

He'd cross that bridge later. First of all, there was Nefert. *Madame* Nefert. A wry smile touched his lips. By all means, the title. Always look for the trade-mark. It impresses the consumer.

He got his car from the garage of the office building and drove uptown on the parkway, turning off into Columbus Circle. Madame Nefert had a front parlor and a few tawdry rooms which no one ever saw, since they probably contained her equipment. A placard on the window proclaimed the woman's profession.

Carnevan mounted the steps and rang. He entered at the sound of a buzzer, turned right, and pushed through a half-open door which he closed behind him. Drapes had been drawn over the windows. The room was illuminated by a dim, reddish glow from lamps in the corners.

It was bare. The carpet had been pushed aside. Signs had been made on the floor with luminous chalk. A blackened pot stood in the center of a pentagram. That was all, and Carnevan shook his head disgustedly. Such a stage setting would impress only the most credulous. Yet he decided to play along till he got to the bottom of this most peculiar advertising stunt.

A CURTAIN was twitched aside, revealing an alcove in which Madame Nefert sat on a hard, plain chair. The woman had not even troubled to don her customary masquerade, Carnevan saw. With her beefy, red face and her stringy hair, she resembled a charwoman out of some Shavian comedy. She wore a flowered wrapper, hanging open to reveal a dirty white slip at her capacious bosom.

The red light flickered on her face.

She looked at Carnevan with glassy, expressionless eyes. "The spirits are —" she began, and fell suddenly silent,

a choking rattle deep in her throat. Her whole body twitched convulsively.

Suppressing a smile, Carnevan said, "Madame Nefert, I'd like to ask you a few questions."

She didn't answer. There was a long, heavy silence. After a time Carnevan made a tentative movement toward the door, but still the woman did not rouse.

She was playing the game to the hilt. He glanced around, saw something white in the blackened pot, and stepped closer to peer down into the interior. Then he retched violently, clawed out a handkerchief and, holding it over his mouth, whirled to confront Madame Nefert.

But he could not find words. Sanity came back. He breathed deeply, realized that a clever papier-maché image had almost destroyed his emotional balance.

Madame Nefert had not moved. She was leaning forward, breathing in stertorous, rasping gasps. A faint, insidious odor crept into Carnevan's nostrils.

Someone said sharply, "Now!"

The woman's hand moved in a fumbling, uncertain gesture. Simultaneously Carnevan was conscious of a newcomer in the room. He whirled, to see, seated in the middle of the pentagram, a small huddled figure that was regarding him steadily.

The red light was dim. All Carnevan could see was a head, and a shapeless body concealed by a dark cloak as the man—or boy—squatted. Yet the sight of that head was enough to make his heart jump excitedly.

For it was not entirely human. At first Carnevan had thought it was a skull. The face was thin, with pale, translucent skin of finest ivory laid lightly over the bone, and it was completely hairless. It was triangular, delicately wedge-shaped, without the ugly protruding knobs of the cheekbones which make human skulls so often hideous. The eyes were certainly inhuman. They slanted up almost to where the hair line would have been had the being possessed hair, and they were like cloudy, gray-green stone, flecked with opalescent dancing lights, red-tinted now by the light.

It was a singularly beautiful face, with the clear, passionless perfection of polished bone. The body Carnevan could not see, hidden as it was by the cloak.

Was that strange face a mask? Carnevan knew it was not. By the subtle, unmistakable revolt of his whole physical being, he knew that he looked upon a horror.

With an automatic reflex, he took out a cigarette and lighted it. The being had made no move meanwhile, and Carnevan abruptly realized that the compass needle in his brain had vanished.

Smoke coiled up from his cigarette. He, Gerald Carnevan, was standing in this dim, red-lit room, with a fake medium in, presumably, a fake trance behind him, and—something—crouching only a few feet away. Outside, a block distant, was Columbus Circle, with electric signs and traffic.

Electric lights meant advertising. A key clicked in Carnevan's brain. *Get the customer wondering.* In this case he seemed to be the customer. The direct approach was hell on salesmen and their foreplanned tactics. Carnevan began to walk directly toward the being.

THE SOFT, pink, childish lips parted. "Wait," a singularly gentle voice commanded. "Don't cross the pentagram, Carnevan. You can't anyway, but you might start a fire."

"That tears it," the man remarked, almost laughing. "Spirits don't speak colloquial English. What's the idea?"

"Well," said the other, not moving, "to begin with, you may call me Azazel. I'm not a spirit. I'm rather more of a demon. As for colloquial English, when I enter your world I naturally adjust myself to it—or am adjusted. My own tongue cannot be heard here. I'm speaking it, but you hear the Earthly equivalent. It's automatically adjusted to your capabilities."

"All right," Carnevan said. "Now what?" He blew smoke through his nostrils.

"You're skeptical," Azazel said, still motionless. "I could convince you in a moment by leaving the pentagram, but I can't do that without your help. At present, the space I'm occupying exists in both our worlds, coincidentally. I *am* a demon, Carnevan, and I want to strike a bargain with you."

"I expect flashlight bulbs to go off in a moment. But you can fake all the photos you want, if that's the game. I won't pay blackmail," Carnevan said, thinking of Diana and making a mental reservation.

"You do," Azazel remarked, and gave a brief, pithy history of the man's relations with Diana Bellamy.

Carnevan felt himself flushing. "That's enough," he said curtly. "It *is* blackmail, eh?"

"Please let me explain—from the beginning. I got in touch with you first at the seance last week. It's incredibly difficult for inhabitants of my . . . my dimension to establish contact with human beings. But in this case I managed it. I implanted certain thoughts in your subconscious mind and held you by those."

"What sort of thoughts?"

"Gratifications," Azazel said. "The death of your senior partner. The removal of Diana Bellamy. Wealth. Power. Triumph. Secretly you treasured those thoughts, and so a link was established between us. Not enough, however, for I couldn't really communicate with you till I'd worked on Madame Nefert."

"Go on," Carnevan said quietly. "She's a charlatan, of course."

"So she is." Azazel smiled. "But she is a Celt. A violin is useless without a violinist. I managed to control her somewhat, and induced her to make the necessary preparations so I could materialize. Then I drew you here."

"Do you expect me to believe you?"

The other's shoulders stirred restlessly. "That is the difficulty. If you accept me, I can serve you well—very well indeed. But you will not do that until you believe."

"I'm not Faust," Carnevan said. "Even if I did believe you, why do you think I'd want to—" He stopped.

"You are human," Azazel said.

FOR A SECOND there was silence. Carnevan angrily dropped his cigarette and crushed it out. "All the legends of history," he muttered. "Folklore—all full of it. Bargains with demons. And always at a price. But I'm an atheist, or an agnostic. Not sure which. A soul—I can't believe I have one. When I die, it's a blackout."

Azazel studied him thoughtfully. "There must be a fee, of course." A curious expression crossed the being's face. There was mockery in it, and fear, too. When he spoke again his voice was hurried.

"I can serve you, Carnevan. I can give you anything you desire—everything, I believe."

"Why did you choose me?"

"The seance drew me. You were the only one present I could touch."

Scarcely flattered, Carnevan frowned. It was impossible for him to believe. He said, at last, "I wouldn't mind—if I thought this wasn't merely some trick. Tell me more about it. Just what you could do for me."

Azazel spoke further. When he had finished, Carnevan's eyes were glistening.

"Even a little of that—"

"It is easy enough," Azazel urged. "All is ready. The ceremony does not take long, and I'll guide you step by step."

Carnevan clicked his tongue, smiling. "There it is. I can't believe. I tell myself that you're real—but deep inside my brain I'm trying to find a logical explanation. And that's all too easy. If I were convinced you are what you say and can—"

Azazel interrupted. "Do you know anything about teratology?"

"Eh? Why—just the layman's knowledge."

The being stood up slowly. He was wearing, Carnevan saw, a voluminous cloak of some dark, opaque, shimmering material.

He said, "If there is no other way of convincing you—and since I cannot leave the pentagram—I must take this means."

A sickening premonition shot through Carnevan as he saw delicate, slim hands fumbling at the fastenings of the cloak. Azazel cast it aside.

Almost instantly he wrapped the garment around him. Carnevan had not moved. But there was blood trickling down his chin.

Then silence, till the man tried to speak, a hoarse, croaking noise that rasped through the room. Carnevan found his voice.

Unexpectedly his words came out in a half shriek. Abruptly he whirled and went to a corner, where he stood with his forehead pressed hard against the wall. When he returned, his face was more composed, though sweat gleamed on it.

"Yes," he said. "Yes?"

"This is the way—" Azazel began.

THE NEXT MORNING Carnevan sat at his desk and talked quietly to the demon, who lounged in a chair, invisible to all but one man, and his voice equally masked. Sunlight slanted in through the windows, and a cool breeze brought in the muffled clamor of traffic. Azazel seemed incredibly real sitting there, his body muffled by the cloak, his skull-like, beautiful head whitened by the sunlight.

"Speak softly," the demon cautioned. "No one can hear me, but they can hear you. Whisper—or just think. It will be clear to me."

"Fair enough." Carnevan rubbed his freshly shaven cheek. "We'd better lay out a plan of campaign. You'll have to earn my soul, you know."

"Eh?" For a second the demon looked puzzled; then he laughed softly. "I'm at your service."

"First—we must arouse no suspicion. Nobody would believe the truth, but I don't want them thinking I'm insane—as I may be," Carnevan continued logically. "But we'll not consider that point just now. What about Madame Nefert? How much does she know?"

"Nothing at all," Azazel said. "She was in a trance while under my control. She remembered nothing when she woke. Still, if you prefer, I can kill her."

Carnevan held up his hand. "Steady

on! That's just where people like Faust made their mistakes. They went hog-wild, got drunk on power, and wrapped themselves up till they couldn't even move. Any murders we may commit must be necessary. Here! Just how much control have I over you?"

"A good deal," Azazel admitted.

"Suppose I asked you to kill yourself—told you to do so?"

For answer, the demon picked up a paper knife from the desk and thrust it deeply into his cloak. Remembering what lay under that garment, Carnevan glanced away hurriedly.

Smiling, Azazel replaced the knife. "Suicide is impossible to a demon, by any means."

"Can't you be killed at all?"

There was a little silence. Then—"Not by you," Azazel said.

Carnevan shrugged. "I'm checking up all the angles. I want to know just where I stand. You must obey me, though. Is that right?"

Azazel nodded.

"So. Now I don't want a million dollars in gold dumped into my lap. Gold's illegal, anyway, and people would ask questions. Any advantages I get must come naturally, without arousing the slightest suspicion. If Eli Dale died, the firm would be without a senior partner. I'd get the job. It carries enough money for my purposes."

"I can get you the largest fortune in the world," the demon suggested.

Carnevan laughed a little. "And then? Everything would be far too easy for me. I want to feel the thrill of achieving things myself—with some help from you. If you cheat once at solitaire, it's different from cheating all through the game. I have a good deal of faith in myself, and want to justify that—build up my ego. People like Faust grew jaded. King Solomon must have been bored to death. Then, too, he never used his brain, and I'll bet it atrophied. Look at Merlin!" Carnevan smiled. "He got so used to calling up devils to do what he wanted that a young snip got the best of him without any trouble. No, Azazel—I want Eli Dale to die, but naturally."

The demon looked at his slim, pale hands.

Carnevan shrugged. "Can you change your form?"

"Of course."

"Into anything?"

For answer, Azazel became, in rapid succession, a large black dog, a lizard, a rattlesnake, and Carnevan himself. Finally he resumed his own form and relaxed again in the chair.

"None of those disguises would help you kill Dale," Carnevan grunted. "We want something that won't be suspected. Do you know what disease germs are, Azazel?"

"I know, from your mind," the other nodded.

"Could you transform yourself into toxins?"

"Why not? If I knew which one you wished, I'd locate a specimen, duplicate its atomic structure, and enter it with my own life force."

"Spinal meningitis," Carnevan said thoughtfully. "That's fatal enough. It'd knock over a man in Dale's senile condition. But I forget whether it's a germ or a virus."

"That doesn't matter," Azazel said. "I'll locate a slide or specimen of the stuff—some hospital should do—and then materialize inside Dale's body as the disease."

"Will it be the same thing?"

"Yes."

"Good enough. The toxin will propagate, I suppose, and that'll be the end of Dale. If it isn't, we'll try something else."

He turned back to his work, and Azazel vanished. The morning dragged past slowly. Carnevan ate at a nearby restaurant, wondering what his familiar demon was doing, and was rather surprised to find that he had a hearty appetite. During the afternoon, Diana phoned. She had, apparently, found out about Carnevan's engagement to Phyllis. She had already telephoned Phyllis.

Carnevan hung up, rigidly repressing his violent rage. After a brief moment he dialed Phyllis' number. She was not at home, he was told.

"Tell her I'll be out to see her tonight," he growled, and slammed the receiver down in its cradle. It was rather a relief to look up and see the shrouded form of Azazel in the chair.

"It's done," the demon said. "Dale has spinal meningitis. He doesn't know it yet, but the toxin propagated very rapidly. A curious experiment. But it worked."

Carnevan tried to focus his mind. It was Phyllis he was thinking of now. He was in love with her, of course—but she was so damned rigid, so incredibly Puritanical. He had made one slip in the past. In her eyes, that might be enough. Would she break the engagement? Surely not! In this day and age, amorous peccadilloes were more or less taken for granted, even by a girl who had been reared in Boston. Carnevan considered his fingernails.

After a time he made an excuse to see Eli Dale, asking his advice on some unimportant business problem, and scrutinized carefully the old man's face. Dale was flushed and bright-eyed, but otherwise seemed normal. Yet the mark of death was on him, Carnevan knew. He would die, the senior partnership would devolve on someone else—and the first step in Carnevan's plan was taken.

As for Phyllis and Diana—why, after all, he owned a familiar demon! With the powers at his control, he could solve this problem, too. Just how he would do that, Carnevan did not know as yet; ordinary methods, he thought, should be used first in every case. He must not grow too dependent on magic.

He dismissed Azazel for the time and drove that night to Phyllis' home. But before that, he made a stop at Diana's apartment. The scene was brief and stormy while it lasted.

DARK, slim, furious and lovely, Diana said she wouldn't let him marry.

"Why not?" Carnevan wanted to know. "After all, my dear, if you want money, I can arrange that."

Diana said unpleasant things about Phyllis. She hurled an ash tray down and stamped on it. "So I'm not good enough to marry! But she is!"

"Sit down and be quiet," Carnevan suggested. "Try and analyze your feelings—"

"You cold-blooded fish!"

"—and see just where you stand. You're not in love with me. Dangling me on a string gives you a feeling of power and possession. You don't want any other woman to have me."

"I pity any woman who does," Diana remarked, selecting another ash tray. She looked remarkably pretty, but Carnevan was in no mood to appreciate beauty.

"All right," he said. "Listen to me. If you string along, you won't lack for money—or anything. But if you try to cause trouble again, you'll certainly regret it."

"I don't scare easily," Diana snapped. "Where are you going? Off to see that yellow-haired wench, I suppose?"

Carnevan favored her with an imperturbable smile, donned his topcoat, and vanished. He drove to the home of the yellow-haired wench, where he encountered not-unforeseen difficulties. But finally he out-argued the maid and was ushered in to face an icicle sitting silently on a couch. It was Mrs. Mardrake.

"Phyllis does not wish to see you, Gerald," she said, her prim mouth biting off the words.

Carnevan girded his loins and began to talk. He talked well. So convincing was his story that he almost persuaded himself that Diana was a myth—that the whole affair had been cooked up by some personal enemy. Mrs. Mardrake finally capitulated, after an internal struggle of some length.

"There must be no scandal," she said at last. "If I thought there was a word of truth in what that woman said to Phyllis—"

"A man in my position has enemies," Carnevan said, thus reminding his hostess that, maritally speaking, he was a fish worth hooking. She sighed.

"Very well, Gerald. I'll ask Phyllis to see you. Wait here."

She swept out of the room, and Carnevan suppressed a smile. Yet he knew it would not be this easy to convince Phyllis.

She did not appear immediately. Carnevan guessed that Mrs. Mardrake was having difficulty in persuading her daughter of his bona fides. He wandered about the room, taking out his cigarette case and then, with a glance at the surroundings, putting it back. What a Victorian house!

A heavy family bible on its stand caught his eye. For want of anything else to do, he went toward it, opening the book at random. A passage leaped up at him.

"If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God."

It was, perhaps, an instinctive reaction that made Carnevan reach up to touch his forehead. He smiled at the conceit. Superstition! Yes—but so were demons.

AT THAT MOMENT Phyllis came in, looking like Evangeline in Acadia, with much the same martyred expression Longfellow's heroine might have worn. Suppressing an ungallant impulse to kick her, Carnevan reached for her hands, failed to capture them, and followed her to a couch.

Puritanism and a pious upbringing has its drawbacks, he thought. This became more evident when, after ten minutes, Phyllis still remained unconvinced of Carnevan's innocence.

"I didn't tell mother everything," she said quietly. "That woman said some things— Well, I could see she was telling the truth."

"I love you," Carnevan said inconsequentially.

"You don't. Or you'd never have taken up with this woman."

"Even if it happened before I knew you?"

"I could forgive many things, Gerald," she said, "but not that."

"You," Carnevan remarked, "don't want a husband. You want a graven image."

It was impossible to break through her calm self-righteousness. Carnevan lost his self-possession. He argued and pleaded, despising himself as he did so.

Of all the women in the world, he had to fall in love with the most hide-bound and Puritanical of them all. Her silence had the quality of enraging him almost to hysteria. He had an impulse to shout obscenities into the room's quiet, religious atmosphere. Phyllis, he knew, was humiliating him horribly, and deep within him something cowered rawly under the lashing he could not stop himself from giving it.

"I love you, Gerald," was all she would say. "But you don't love me. I can't forgive you this. Please go before you make it worse."

He flung out of the house, seething with fury, hot and sick with the realization that he had failed to maintain his poise. Phyllis, Phyllis, Phyllis! An imperturbable iceberg. She knew nothing of humanity. Emotions had never existed in her breast unless they were well-schooled, dainty as an antimacassar of lace. A china doll, expecting the rest of the world to be of china. Carnevan stood by his car, shaking with rage, wishing more than anything else on earth to hurt Phyllis as he himself had been hurt.

Something stirred inside the car. It was Azazel, the cloak shrouding his dark body, the bone-white face expressionless.

Carnevan flung out an arm behind him, pointing. "The girl!" he said hoarsely. "She . . . she—"

"You need not speak," Azazel murmured. "I read your thoughts. I shall —do as you wish."

He was gone. Carnevan sprang into the car, inserted the key, savagely started the motor. As the vehicle began to move he heard a thin, knife-edged scream lancing out from the house he had left.

He stopped the car and raced back, chewing his lip.

As the hastily summoned physician said, Phyllis Mardrake had suffered a severe nervous shock. The reason was unknown, but, presumably, it might have been the ordeal of her interview with Carnevan, who said nothing to dispel that illusion. Phyllis simply lay and twitched, her eyes staring glassily. Sometimes her lips formed words.

"The cloak— Under the cloak—"

And then she would alternately laugh and scream until exhaustion claimed her.

She would recover, but it would take some time. In the meanwhile, Phyllis was sent to a private sanitarium, where she fell into hysterics whenever she saw Dr. Joss, who happened to be bald-headed. Her jabbering about cloaks grew less frequent, and occasionally Carnevan was permitted to visit her. For she asked for him. The quarrel had been patched up, and Phyllis almost half admitted that she had been wrong in her stand.

When she had completely recovered she would marry Carnevan. But there must be no more slips.

The horror she had seen was buried deep in her mind, emerging only during delirium, and in her frequent nightmares. Carnevan was thankful that she did not remember Azazel. Yet he saw much of the demon these days—for he was fulfilling a malicious, cruel little scheme of his own.

It had started soon after Phyllis' breakdown, when Diana kept telephoning him at the office. At first Carnevan spoke shortly to her. Then he realized that she, actually, was responsible for Phyllis' near-madness.

It was, of course, right that she should suffer. Not death. Anyone might die.

Eli Dale, for example, was already fatally ill with spinal meningitis. But a more subtle form of punishment—a torture such as Phyllis had undergone.

Carnevan's face wore an expression that was not pleasant to see as he summoned the demon and issued instructions.

"Slowly, gradually, she will be driven insane," he said. "She will be given time to realize what is happening. Give her—glimpses, so to speak. A cumulative series of inexplicable happenings. I'll give you the detailed directions when I work them out. She told me that she isn't easily frightened," Carnevan finished, and rose to pour himself a drink. He offered one to the demon, but it was refused.

Azazel sat motionless in a dark corner of the apartment, occasionally glancing out of the window to where Central Park lay far below.

Carnevan was struck by a sudden thought. "How do you react to this? Demons are supposed to be evil. Does it give you pleasure to . . . to hurt people?"

The beautiful skull face was turned toward him. "Do you know what evil is, Carnevan?"

The man splashed soda into his rye. "I see. A matter of semantics. Of course, it's an arbitrary term. Humanity has set up its own standards—"

Azazel's slanted, opalescent eyes glittered. "That is moral anthropomorphism. And egotism. You haven't considered environment. The physical properties of this world of yours caused good and evil, as you know it."

It was Carnevan's sixth drink, and he felt argumentative. "That I don't quite understand. Morality comes from the mind and the emotions."

"A RIVER has its source," Azazel countered. "But there's a difference between the Mississippi and the Colorado. If human beings had evolved in—well, my world, for example—the whole pattern of good and evil would have been entirely different. Ants have a social structure. But it isn't like yours. The environment is different."

"There's a difference between insects and men, too."

The demon shrugged. "We are not alike. Less alike than you and an ant. For both of you have, basically, two common instincts. Self-preservation and propagation of the species. Demons can't propagate."

"Most authorities agree on that," Carnevan granted. "Possibly it explains the reason for changelings, too. How is it that there are so many kinds of demons?"

Azazel questioned him with his eyes.

"Oh—you know. Gnomes and kobolds and trolls and jinn and werewolves and vampires and—"

"There are more kinds of demons than humanity knows," Azazel explained. "The reason is pretty obvious. Your world tends toward a fixed pattern—a state of stasis. You know what entropy is. The ultimate aim of your universe is a unity, changeless and eternal. Your branches of evolution will finally meet and remain at one fixed type. Such offshoots as the moa and the auk will die out, as dinosaurs and mammoths have died. In the end there will be stasis. My universe tends toward physical anarchy. In the beginning there was only one type. In the end it will be ultimate chaos."

"Your universe is like a negative of mine," Carnevan pondered. "But—wait! You said demons can't die. And

they can't propagate. How can there be any progress at all?"

"I said demons can't commit suicide," Azazel pointed out. "Death may come to them, but from an outside source. That applies to procreation, too."

It was too confused for Carnevan. "You must have emotions. Self-preservation implies fear of death."

"Our emotions are not yours. Clinically, I can analyze and understand Phyllis' reactions. She was reared very rigidly, and subconsciously she has resented that oppression. She never admitted, even to herself, her desire to break free. But you were a symbol to her. Secretly she admired and envied you, because you were a man and, as she thought, able to do whatever you wanted. Love is a false synonym for propagation, as the soul is a wish fulfillment creation growing out of self-preservation. Neither exists. Phyllis' mind is a maze of inhibitions, fears, and hopes. Puritanism, to her, represents security. That was why she couldn't forgive you for your affair with Diana. It was an excuse for retreating to the security of her former life pattern."

Carnevan listened interestedly. "Go on."

"When I appeared to her, the psychic shock was violent. Her subconscious ruled for a time. That was why she became reconciled to you. She is an escapist; her previous security seemed to have failed, so she fulfills both her escape wish and her desire for protection by agreeing to marry you."

CARNEVAN mixed himself another drink. He remembered something.

"You just said the soul is nonexistent —eh?"

Azazel's body stirred under the shrouding cloak. "You misunderstood me."

"I don't think so," Carnevan said, feeling a cold, deadly horror under the warm numbness of liquor. "Our bargain was that you serve me in exchange for my soul. Now you imply that I have no soul. What was your real motive?"

"You're trying to frighten yourself," the demon murmured, his strange eyes alert. "All through history, religion has been founded on the hypothesis that souls exist."

"Do they?"

"Why not?"

"What is a soul like?" Carnevan asked.

"You couldn't imagine," Azazel said. "There'd be no standard of comparison. By the way, Eli Dale died two minutes ago. You're now the senior partner of the firm. May I congratulate you?"

"Thank you," Carnevan nodded. "We'll change the subject, if you like. But I intend to find out the truth sooner or later. If I have no soul, you're up to something else. However —let's get back to Diana."

"You wish to drive her mad."

"I wish *you* to drive her mad. She is the schizophrenic type—slim and long boned. She has a stupid sort of self-confidence. She has built her life on a foundation of things she knows to be real. Those things must be removed."

"Well?"

"She is afraid of the dark," Carnevan said, and his smile was quite unpleasant. "Be subtle, Azazel. She will hear voices. She will see people following her. Delusions of persecution. One by one her senses will begin to fail her. Or, rather, deceive her. She'll smell things no one else does. She'll hear voices.

She'll taste poison in her food. She'll begin to feel things—unpleasant things. If necessary, she may, at the last—see things."

"This is evil, I suppose," Azazel observed, rising from his chair. "My interest is purely clinical. I can reason that such matters are important to you, but that's as far as it goes."

The telephone rang. Carnevan learned that Eli Dale was dead—spinal meningitis.

To celebrate the occasion, he poured another drink and toasted Azazel, who had vanished to visit Diana. Carnevan's thin, hard face was only slightly flushed by the liquor he had consumed. He stood in the center of the apartment and revolved slowly, eying the furnishings, the books, the bric-a-brac. It would be well to find another place—something a bit more swanky. A place suitable for a married couple. He wondered how long it would be before Phyllis was completely recovered.

Azazel— Just what was the demon after?—he wondered. Certainly not his soul. What, then?

One night, two weeks later, he rang the bell of Diana's apartment. The girl's voice asked who was there, and she opened the door a slight crack before admitting Carnevan. He was shocked at the change in her.

There was little tangible alteration. Diana was holding herself under iron control, but her make-up was too heavy. That in itself was revealing. It was a symbol of the mental shield she was trying to erect against the psychical invasion. Carnevan said solicitously, "Good Lord, Diana, what's wrong? You sounded hysterical over the phone. I told you last night you should see a doctor."

She fumbled for a cigarette, which trembled slightly in her hands as Carnevan lit it. "I have. He . . . he wasn't much help, Jerry. I'm so glad you're not angry at me any more."

"Angry? Here, sit down. That's it. I'll mix a drink. No, I got over being angry; we get along together, and Phyllis—well, we couldn't very well have a *ménage a trois*. She's in a sanitarium, you know, and it'll be a long while before she gets out. Even then she may be a lunatic—" Carnevan sucked in his breath. "Sorry."

Diana pushed back her dark hair and turned to face him on the couch. "Jerry, do you think I'm going crazy?"

"No, I don't," he said. "I think you need a rest, or a change."

She didn't hear. Her head was tilted to one side, as though she listened to a soundless voice. Glancing up, Carnevan saw Azazel standing across the room—invisible to the girl, but apparently not inaudible.

"Diana!" he said sharply.

Her lips parted. Her voice was unsteady as she looked at him. "Sorry. You were saying?"

"What did the doctor tell you?"

"Nothing much." She did not wish to follow up the line of discussion. Instead, she took the drink Carnevan had mixed, eyed it, and sipped the highball. Then she put down the glass.

"Anything wrong?" the man asked.

"No. How does it taste to you?"

"All right."

Carnevan wondered just what Diana had tasted in her drink. Bitter almonds, perhaps. Another of Azazel's deft illusions. He ran his fingers through the girl's hair, feeling a thrill of power as he did so. A nasty sort of revenge, he thought. Odd that Diana's distress did

not touch him in the slightest degree. Yet he was not basically evil, Carnevan knew. The old, old problem of arbitrary standards—right and wrong.

Azazel said—and his words were heard by Carnevan alone: "Her control cannot last much longer. I think she'll break tomorrow. A manic-depressive may commit suicide, so I'll guard against that. Every dangerous weapon she touches will seem red-hot to her."

ABRUPTLY, without warning, the demon vanished. Carnevan grunted and finished his drink. From the corner of his eye he saw something move.

Slowly he turned his head, but it was gone. What had it been? Like a black shadow. Formless, inchoate. Without reason, Carnevan's hands were shaking. Utterly amazed, he put down his drink and surveyed the apartment.

Azazel's presence had never affected him thus before. It was probably a reaction—no doubt he had been keeping a tight control over his nerves, without noticing it. After all, demons *are* supernatural.

From the corner of his eye he again saw the cloudy blackness. This time he did not move as he tried to analyze it. The thing hovered just on the edge of his range of vision. Imperceptibly, his eyes moved slightly, and it was gone.

A formless black cloud. Formless? No, it was, he thought, spindle-shaped, motionless and upright on its axis. His hands were shaking more than ever.

Diana was eying him. "What's the matter, Jerry? Am I making you nervous?"

"Too much work at the office," he said. "I'm the new senior partner, you know. I'll push off now. You'd better see that doctor again tomorrow."

She did not reply, only watching him as he let himself out of the apartment. Driving home, Carnevan again caught a brief glimpse of the black, foggy spindle. Not once could he get a clear view of it. It hovered just on the border of his vision. He sensed, though he could not see, certain features cloudily discerned in it. What they were he could not guess. But his hands trembled.

Coldly, furiously, his intellect fought against the unreasonable terror of his physical structure. He faced the alien. Or— No—he did not face it. It slid away and vanished. Azazel?

He called the demon's name, but there was no response. Hurtling toward his apartment, Carnevan sucked at his lower lip and thought hard. How— Why—

What was so unreasonably, subtly horrifying about this—this apparition?

He did not know, unless it was, perhaps, that vague hint of features in the blackness which he could never face di-

rectly. He sensed that those features were unspeakable, and yet he had a perverse curiosity to behold them directly. Once safe in his apartment, he again glimpsed the black spindle, at the edge of his vision, near the window. He swung swiftly to face it; it vanished. But at that moment a shock of unreasoning horror gripped Carnevan, a deadly, sickening feeling that he *might* see that against which his whole physical being revolted.

"Azazel," he called softly.

Nothing.

"Azazel!"

Carnevan poured a drink, lit a cigarette and found a magazine. He was untroubled until bedtime and during the night, but in the morning, when first he opened his eyes, something black and spindle-shaped skittered away as he looked toward it.

He telephoned Diana. She seemed much better, she said. Apparently Azazel wasn't on the job. Unless the black thing *was* Azazel. Carnevan hurriedly drove to his office, had black coffee sent up, and then drank milk instead. His nerves needed soothing rather than stimulating.

TWICE that morning the black spindle appeared in the office. Each time there was that horrifying knowledge that if Carnevan looked at it directly, the features would be clear to him. And in spite of himself, he tried to look. Vainly, of course.

His work suffered. Presently he knocked off and drove to the sanitarium to see Phyllis. She was much better, and spoke of the forthcoming marriage. Carnevan's palms were clammy as a black spindle retreated hurriedly across the sunny, pleasant room.

Worst of all, perhaps, was the realization that if he *did* succeed in looking squarely at the phantasm, he would not go mad. But he would want to. That he realized quite well. His instinctive physical reaction told him as much. Nothing belonging to this universe or any remotely kindred one could bring about the empty hollowness within his body, the shocking feeling that his cellular structure was trying to shrink away from the—the spindle.

He drove back to Manhattan, narrowly avoiding an accident on the George Washington Bridge as he closed his eyes to avoid seeing what wasn't there when he opened them again. It was past sundown. The jeweled towers of New York rose against a purple sky. Their geometrical neatness looked devoid of warmth, inhospitable and unhelpful. Carnevan stopped at a bar, drank two whiskeys, and left when a black spindle ran across the mirror.

Back in his apartment, he sat with his head in his hands for perhaps five minutes. When he stood up, his face was hard and vicious. His eyes flickered slightly; then he caught himself.

"Azazel," he said—and, more loudly: "Azazel! I am your master! Appear to me!"

His thought probed out, forceful, hard as iron. Behind it lay unformed terror. Was Azazel the black spindle? Would he appear—completely?

"Azazel! I am your master! Obey me! I summon you!"

The demon stood before Carnevan, materializing from empty air. The beautiful face of pale bone was expressionless; the slanted, opalescent, pupilless eyes were impassive. Under the dark cloak, Azazel's body shivered once and was still.

With a sigh, Carnevan sank down in his chair. "All right," he said. "Now what's up? What's the idea?"

Azazel said quietly, "I went back to my own world. I would have remained there had you not summoned me."

"What is this—spindle thing?"

"It is not of your world," the demon said. "It is not of mine. It pursues me."

"Why?"

"You have your stories of men who have been haunted. Sometimes by demons. In my world—I have been haunted."

Carnevan licked his lips. "By this thing?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Azazel's shoulders seemed to hunch together. "I do not know. Except that it is very horrible, and it pursues me."

Carnevan lifted his hands and pushed hard at his eyes. "No. No. It's too crazy. *Something* haunting a demon. Where did it come from?"

"I know of my universe and yours. That is all. This thing came from outside both our time sectors, I think."

With a sudden flash of insight, Carnevan said, "That was why you offered to serve me."

Azazel's face did not change. "Yes. The thing was getting closer and closer to me. I thought if I entered your universe, I might escape it. But it followed."

"And you couldn't enter this world without my help. All that talk about my soul was so much guff."

"Yes. The thing followed me. I fled back to my universe, and it did not pursue. Perhaps it could not. It may be able to move in only one direction—from its world to mine, and then to yours, but not the other way. It remained here, I know."

"It remained," Carnevan said, very white, "to haunt me."

"You feel the same horror toward it? I wondered. We are so unlike physically—"

"I never see it directly. It has—features?"

Azazel did not answer. Silence hung in the room.

At last Carnevan bent forward in his chair. "The thing haunts you—unless you go back to your own world. Then it haunts me. Why?"

"I don't know. It's alien to me, Carnevan."

"But you're a demon! You have supernatural powers—"

"Supernatural to you. There are powers supernatural to demons."

Carnevan poured himself a drink. His eyes were narrowed.

"Very well. I have enough power over you to keep you in this world, or you wouldn't have returned when I summoned you. So it's a deadlock. As long as you stay here, that thing will haunt you. I won't let you go to *your* world, for then it would haunt me—as it has been doing. Though it seems to be gone now."

"It has not gone," Azazel said tonelessly.

Carnevan's body shook uncontrollably. "Mentally I can tell myself not to be frightened. Physically the thing is . . . is—"

"It is horrible even to me," Azazel said. "Remember, I have seen it directly. Eventually it will destroy me, if you keep me in this world of yours."

"Humans have exorcised demons," Carnevan pointed out. "Isn't there any way you can exorcise that thing?"

"No."

"A blood sacrifice?" Carnevan suggested nervously. "Holy water? Bell, book and candle?" He sensed the foolishness of the proposals as he made them.

But Azazel looked thoughtful. "None of those. But perhaps—life force." The dark cloak quivered.

Carnevan said, "Elementals have been exorcised, according to folklore. But first it's necessary to make them visible and tangible. Giving them ectoplasm—blood—I don't know."

The demon nodded slowly. "In other words, translating the equation to its lowest common denominator. Humans cannot fight a disembodied spirit. But if that spirit is drawn into a vessel of flesh, it is subject to earthly physical laws. I think that is the way, Carnevan."

"You mean—"

"The thing that pursues me is entirely alien. But if I can reduce it to its lowest common denominator, I can destroy it. As I could destroy you, had I not promised to serve you. And, of course, if your destruction would help me. Suppose I give that thing a sacrifice. It must, for a time, partake of the nature of the thing it assimilates. Human life force should do."

Carnevan listened eagerly. "Will it work?"

"I think it will. I will give the thing a human sacrifice. It will become, briefly and partially, human, and a demon can easily destroy a human being."

"A sacrifice—"

"Diana. It will be easiest, since I already have weakened the fortress of her consciousness. I must break down all the barriers of her brain—a psychical substitute for the sacrificial knife of pagan religions."

Carnevan gulped the last of his drink. "Then you can destroy the thing?"

Azazel nodded. "That is my belief. But what will be left of Diana will be in no way human. You will be asked questions by the authorities. However, I shall try to protect you."

And with that he vanished before Carnevan could raise an objection. The apartment was deadly still. Carnevan looked around, half expecting to see the black spindle flashing away as he glanced toward it. But there was no trace of anything supernatural.

He was still sitting in the chair, half an hour later, when the telephone rang. Carnevan answered it.

"Yes. . . . Who? . . . *What?* Murdered? . . . No, I . . . I'll be right over."

He replaced the receiver and straightened, eyes aglow. Diana was—was dead. Murdered, quite horribly, and there were certain factors that puzzled the police. Well, he was safe. Suspicion might point at him, but nothing could ever be proved. He had not gone near Diana all that day.

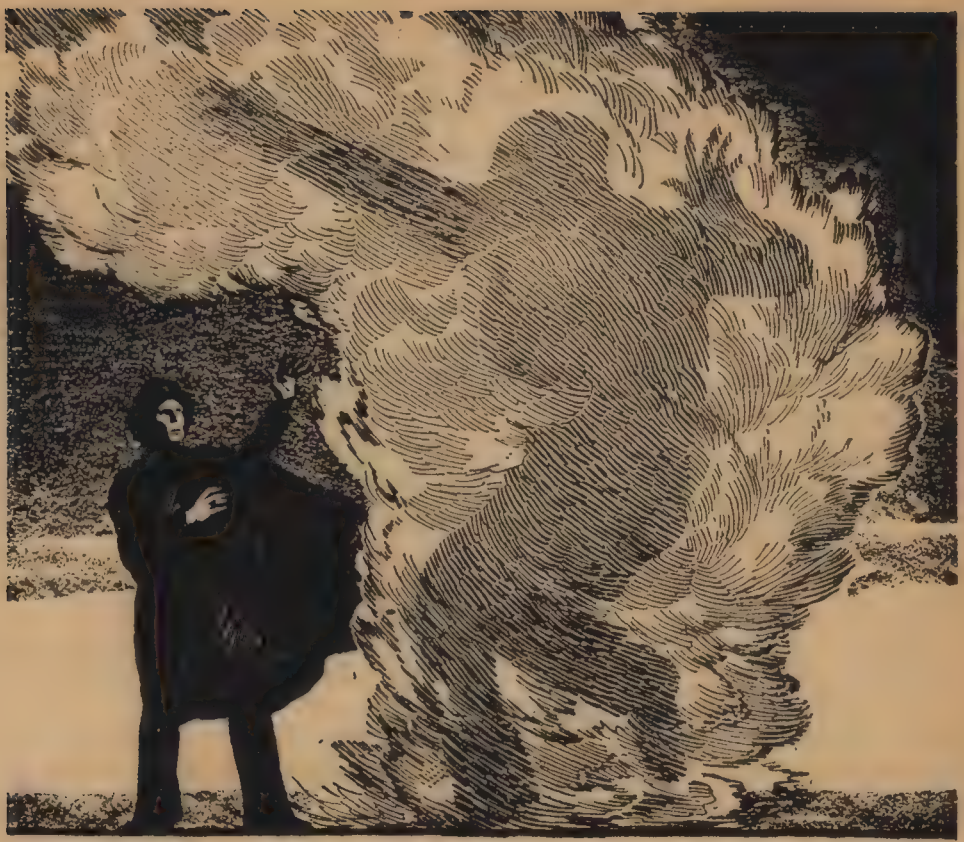
"Congratulations, Azazel," Carnevan said softly. He crushed out his cigarette and turned to get his topcoat from the closet.

The black spindle had been waiting behind him. This time it did not flash away as he looked at it.

It did not flash away. Carnevan saw it. He saw it distinctly. He saw every feature of what he had mistakenly imagined to be a spindle of black fog.

The worst part of it was that Carnevan didn't go mad.

THE END.



MR. JINX

by ROBERT ARTHUR

● The Indian Mystic had a nice proposition for sporting promoters. He could make accidents "happen." He wanted money—unless, of course, the promoters didn't mind accidents—

Illustrated by Orban

THE impact upon a certain section of the New York social stratum of the lean, mahogany-complexioned, knife-faced gentleman in the black turban for a time promised to be terrific—like the concussion of a Joe Louis jab on the jaw of a third-rate contender from Upper Yawkey Falls, Idaho, or the caress of a Florida hurricane on a new bungalow development.

If only he had never crossed Millie Duane's path—

And if Millie hadn't been trying to get fifty grand belonging to Jimmy Donegan out of Roscoe Wentworth, so she and Jimmy could get married and go to Texas to raise blooded livestock and a family—

And—

But heck, that's the story! It also

includes the truth about what happened to Little Pitty, the jet-eyed killer who vanished from human view in broad daylight on Eighth Avenue while waiting for a convenient opportunity to put the slug on Roscoe Wentworth. As well as how Maxie Mullion came to disappear from a running bath in a locked bathroom in his penthouse thirty-one stories in the air. Both here revealed for the first time.

So to begin. With Millie, of course—

Millie Duane was a red-headed little wren three sizes bigger than a minute and twice as energetic as a thimbleful of molecules, which are the stuff science says a thimble of would run a battleship from New York to London—providing, of course, it didn't hit a mine on the way.

Millie had as many attractive curves as a scenic railway, and she knew more about the manly art of modified murder than Roscoe Wentworth himself, who, though he didn't invent it, patented a lot of new improvements on it. Her dad had been Miltie Duane, a fight manager and an honest one. He died when she was fifteen. Millie hated crookedness of any kind, especially in fighting, but she worked for Roscoe Wentworth because a girl had to live.

Had to live because some day a guy like Jimmy Donegan was going to come along.

Now, strictly speaking, Jimmy Donegan doesn't come into this tale at all. He's distinctly offstage motivation. Except that if you looked into Millie's blue eyes you might have seen his reflection there even when he wasn't present. If you had—or if, more prosaically, you saw his mug on the sporting page the night he won the light-heavy crown—you saw a clean-cut face, a squarish jaw, a grin, nice teeth, laughing eyes, and brown hair with something of a curl in it.

Too nice a face—anyway, Millie thought so—to be scrambled around by the impact of countless fists. Especially when Jimmy didn't particularly like fighting and only had gone into it, after getting out of agricultural college, so he could collect a stake with which to buy a farm in Texas—a ranch he could turn into a show-place breeding farm.

So that when Roscoe signed him up, and Millie saw him for the first time, right down deep inside her she knew it had happened. She was in love. And she was determined that she, with her superior knowledge of the fight business—and of Roscoe Wentworth, whose private secretary she was—was going to look out for Jimmy's interests.

Which she did, so effectively that inside a year and a half—most of the time over Roscoe Wentworth's pitiful protests—she maneuvered Jimmy into the championship before a capacity crowd at the Garden. Roscoe hadn't been ready for Jimmy to be champ yet—figuring lots of cash-bearing angles in holding him off—but Millie willed otherwise.

If it had been love at first sight for Millie, it had been ditto and double that for Jimmy. The only thing they had waited for was the championship. With that to retire on, and fifty grand—that was what they figured his savings ought to be by then—to buy the farm with, they'd get married and shake the soot of Manhattan off their shoes faster than Roscoe Wentworth could chisel a dollar from a fighter's purse. Jimmy described Texas so vividly that Millie could hear the cattle bawling, and she knew she was going to love it.

So now Jimmy was champ. And

they were all ready to take up the serious business of matrimony. Except that there was a fly, a short, plump, pink-faced fly named Roscoe Wentworth, in the well-known ointment.

"Roscoe," Millie said, her voice cool and crisp, a little green glow altering the blue of her eyes, "you're a louse."

"Please, Millie," Roscoe Wentworth begged, lifting a plump hand in half-hearted protest, "you mustn't bother me now. I got troubles on my mind."

It was a June day, with a benign sun gilding the pavements of Manhattan. Roscoe, seated behind a desk big enough for a fast game of tennis, was smoking a Havana stogie with nervous puffs. In the flat safe behind him were the receipts from the previous night's bout between Bombardier Benson, the Swedish Blitzkrieg, and Neverdown Nevens, the Granite Giant. Deducting expenses and taxes, there remained fifty grand clear for Roscoe Wentworth. But this morning Roscoe could not quite summon up the *joie de vivre* the figures called for.

Ever and again, all morning long, he had found himself glancing out the broad, plate glass windows at the figure stalking back and forth across the street. Of course, Johnny Pitty—better known as "Little" Pitty—probably wouldn't really shoot him. After all, even Roscoe had thought that Neverdown was going to win last night. It had been pure accident that the Bombardier, ducking to avoid a looping right, had somehow managed to bang his frontal bone against the Granite Giant's chin.

The damage to the Swedish Blitzkrieg's skull had been negligible. But no one could dispute that Neverdown Nevens had a fractured jaw. If Little Pitty had dropped ten Gs, still, hadn't Roscoe himself lost.

But Mr. Wentworth could not put his doubts at rest. There was something feline about Little Pitty's back-and-forth stalk. Roscoe found his head swiveling first one way then the other, like a spectator at a tennis match.

Perhaps it would be best to make good to the fellow his ten thousand dollars, even though—

"Roscoe!" Millie's voice interrupted his troubled thoughts. "Stop waggling your head back and forth and listen if you don't want me to get annoyed. I'm not here as your secretary any more. I've resigned. I'm here as Mrs. Jimmy Donegan to-be, about Jimmy's contract —and a little matter of fifty thousand dollars in lawful United States currency, legal tender for the payment of all debts, public or private."

"Now, Millie," Roscoe began placatingly, with an effort taking his eyes off Little Pitty, "I don't know what you mean. All Jimmy's contract says is that he is gonna fight three more fights for me before he retires. Or else he forfeits fifty thousand, the amount of his last purse, which I am withholding persuant to article five, paragraph B, as security for the performance of the agreed upon—"

"Yes, Roscoe"—honey dripped from Millie's curved and kissable lips—"I have had a lawyer look at the contract, and he has already told me what it says. But Roscoe, you and Jimmy had a verbal agreement that after he won the championship, he would be released from all contracts without obligation, providing he didn't fight again for somebody else."

Roscoe Wentworth mopped his brow.

"Yeah, Millie," he conceded. "But that was only a gentleman's agreement. This other contract is *signed*. Look at it like this, Millie. I, personally, spent a lot of money building Jimmy up. No,

don't snort like that. It don't become a pretty girl to curl her lips so. He's a valuable propitty. Now am I gonna lose all my investment because he wants to go back to Texas an' raise hogs?"

Millie snorted again, shaking her red-gold curls in a menacing manner.

"It would be fair, *if* you had spent any money on Jimmy, which you haven't, and *if* that was all the contract said," she declared. "But the contract specifies *three fights in defense of his championship!* And I know you, Roscoe Wentworth! For every fight in defense of his title, you'd book him for three others that weren't. And suppose he lost the crown! Then he'd have to fight for you until he won it again so he could defend it, so he wouldn't lose the fifty thousand you're holding out, and that we've been planning all along to buy a stock farm with. It might take years!

"No, Roscoe, I won't stand for it. I want that contract torn up, and I want that fifty thousand of Jimmy's, right now!"

She stamped a small foot and glared at Roscoe Wentworth. Roscoe, secure in the knowledge that if she manhandled him in any way she could go to jail for it, glared back, unyieldingly.

It was an impasse, will meeting will in a contest of strength, and how it would have turned out no one knows. For it was at that moment the tall gentleman with the beady eyes and the black turban entered, unannounced.

Mr. Jinx had arrived in town.

He came in through the door, but to Millie and Roscoe it was as if he had materialized on Roscoe's Bokhara rug. Not until he coughed did they turn and realize anyone was there.

Roscoe's eyes bugged. Even Millie stared in open-mouthed astonishment as the intruder favored them with a calm, narrow-lidded scrutiny.

The arrival of the sinister, turbaned one in New York was quite unobserved, and so far as can be determined, no one can recall noticing him before his arrival that morning in the office of the Fair-Square Sporting Club. Which is odd, for if ever there was an observable figure, it was him. It was he? Thanks. Six feet two he stood, dressed in a drape-cut suit of coffee-colored silk of a special weave that would wear till doomsday. In a way, fortunate. Otherwise his clothing was conventional, save that topping off the outfit—literally—a jet-black turban was wrapped about his high-domed head. And beneath the turban, eyes like black glass marbles gazed unwinkingly at Millie and Roscoe from either side of a hawk-beaked nose.

The curious caller carried a cane with a golden head, unpleasantly carved to look like a cobra, and on his ring finger, Millie noticed, being more observant than Roscoe Wentworth, a ring of beaten gold which held, not a jewel, but a tiny crystal globe half an inch across.

With a flourish, their visitor held out a parchment card.

"Permit me," he said, his voice deep, with a curious muted quality, like the throbbing of a temple gong in the distance. Then, as Roscoe took the proffered card, the turbaned one let his eyes rest on Millie, traveling over her from head to feet in a leisurely journey that brought a crimson flush of embarrassment to her cheeks.

His gaze only left her, after having apparently appraised—and approved of—every charm she possessed, concealed or revealed, when Roscoe Wentworth

looked up from the card, on which flowing characters spelled out *The Prince Agah Shan y Pasha Rehab Neroc d'Ghengs.*

"Pronounced *Jinx,*" the caller informed Roscoe somberly. "We will dispense with formality. You may call me simply—Mr. Jinx."

"Uh . . . how-do, Mr. . . . um, Jinx," Roscoe gulped. "Uh—"

"Of course. You wish to know my business here. I am in the accident . . . ah, profession."

"Uh, insurance?" Roscoe mumbled. "Sorry. Can't use any." Then his eyes swiveled toward that pacing figure in the street, momentarily forgotten. "Although, maybe—"

"Ah, no," Mr. Jinx purred, clasping both hands over the top of his cobra cane. "You misunderstand. I *cause* accidents."

"Cause accidents!" Breathing heavily, Roscoe found himself on his feet. The old protection racket!. As if he hadn't just bought off the Mahoney mob by promising them inside dope on all his fights, so they could place their money right. Now this faker—

"Not faker." The deep voice was resonant in the room. "Fakir. You must not confuse the two. Now sit down, Mr. Wentworth"—and under the unwinking, snakelike gaze Roscoe found himself sitting again—"and let me explain. Briefly. I do not enjoy conversation. Although—"

The black eyes flicked for an instant to Millie. Then the turbaned one resumed.

"My profession," he went on, "is that of a causer of accidents. For a consideration I will refrain from employing my somewhat peculiar and unique talents to your disadvantage. If you do not care to retain my services—well, odd things may happen to your hirelings in their combats, and it is even possible that you yourself may suffer some unfortunate experiences. Do I make myself clear?"

"You're darn tootin' you do!" Roscoe declared, inelegantly. "Protection, huh! Well, I got protection awready. An' you're gonna get th' gate."

He pressed a buzzer. The door opened. Two large bruisers, retired from active service in the wrestling wracket—pardon me, racket—but still plenty good enough for bouncers, lumbered in. They were Murderous Mordred, the Minnesota Mauler, once champion of Mexico, and Ivan Yousapouf, the Russian Massacre, once Champion of Champions—the only title he could win.

"Throw him out!" Roscoe hollered. "Toss him on his ear so hard he bounces!"

WITH FIRE in their eyes and garlic on their breath, Wentworth's two behemoths charged. Mr. Jinx, however, made no move to avoid them. He threw himself up, folded his arms so that the hand bearing his ring was uppermost, and stared down into the transparent depth of its tiny crystal ball.

What he saw there is unknown. But what happened was immediate. The Mauler stepped on one of his own feet and fell heavily, banging his head against the desk and chipping the corner. From there he thundered to the floor and lay prone, smiling in unconsciousness—probably dreaming he was back on the mat again in the careless days of his youth.

The Massacre, continuing on, swung on Mr. Jinx. He missed and whirled around, getting in a solid blow at the base of his own skull. Like a poled ox

he fell on top of the Mauler, and after a moment began to snore.

"You see?" the turbaned one asked. "It is but a minor example of my powers."

"Powers!" Millie snorted. "Those poor, punch-drunk palookas could knock themselves silly in a feather bed. Why, Ivan had a bad dream one night and bit himself in the small of the back. And got blood poisoning, too!"

"Sure!" Roscoe chimed in. "You ain't proved nothing."

Mr. Jinx did not smile. He stared at Roscoe, and his unwinking gaze probed the fat little man like a knife. Finally he nodded, the black turban moving in a slow, ominous arc.

"You have an enemy," he told Roscoe in resonant tones. "The one outside now. He wishes to kill you. You fear him. Upon him I will demonstrate my greatest power. It will not be an accident that he suffers. I will make the proof of my talents plain. I will dispose of him, once and for all, beyond the art of man to recall. He will go into limbo."

"Limbo?" Roscoe repeated doubtfully. "That's in Russia some place, ain't it?"

"Limbo," Mr. Jinx assured him, teeth flashing briefly in a cruel smile, "lies in a land between life and death. It is not a nice place."

"It still sounds like Russia to me," Roscoe murmured, uneasily, but he turned to the window to watch. Millie turned too, skepticism and doubt struggling on her countenance.

Mr. Jinx folded his arms and gazed into the crystal of his ring with such concentration that perspiration sprang out on his forehead. His lips moved, and they heard words, strange and harsh and ringing, like the muted clash of brass.

Across the street Little Pitty was staring up at the window. He saw Roscoe Wentworth, and made a motion toward his pocket. The fat man would have ducked back, except for a sight that held him in a species of paralysis.

Eighth Avenue was tolerably empty, except for the little gunman. So there was no one in the way of the mustard-colored haze that began to collect at the corner of Forty-ninth Street, and swirling gently, drifted northward toward Little Pitty.

The killer did not see it. It came up from behind him, vague of outline, like a top spinning at terrific speed. And then it swirled into him. The gunman staggered backward, as if some great force had seized him, and was engulfed in the heart of the mist. For a second or so the shadowy mass whirled there, then it began to drift north again, dissolving as it moved, so that by the time it reached Fiftieth Street it was gone.

And so was Little Pitty!

"He's gone," Millie whispered, her voice queer. "Gone!"

Mr. Roscoe Wentworth stumbled backward to his swivel chair and collapsed into it.

"Ulp!" he gurgled. "What ha-happened to him?"

"He has been removed," Mr. Jinx murmured. "The doorway has been opened for him, and he has been drawn through into limbo. Which is a most unpleasant place where one is neither dead nor alive, but wanders homeless until doomsday."

"You can bring him back, though?" Roscoe asked.

The tall, turbaned one shook his head, "That is beyond my power. The forces

I control do not extend to that. I offer one-way passage only.

And he smiled, his lips drawing back in a curious curl that made Roscoe Wentworth shudder, though the day was hot.

But disbelief still was mirrored on Millie's features.

"Just what *are* these 'powers' of yours, Mr. Jinx?" she demanded. "And who are you, anyway?"

The man in the black turban breathed on the gold head of his cobra cane and polished it gently with his palm. His lips smiled, but his eyes held no mirth.

"I am from the East," he answered, directing his whole attention upon Millie. "In my boyhood I was destined to be a priest, but found the studies boring. I took up others, less well known. My master was a magician of rather sinister repute. From him I learned the control of certain powers, such as you have seen demonstrated. In seeking to turn these to my profit, it occurred to me that here in the Western world is to be found much wealth. I have come to obtain a share of it, by placing my abilities at the service of those who may have use for them."

There was mockery in his voice now.

"It has occurred to me that what is known as the sporting world is a good place to begin. In it men are—less scrupulous. In time I shall extend my services to higher levels of society. For the present I shall deal in simple accidents and removals—such as you have witnessed. In time, when I have a sufficiency of worldly goods, I shall return to my own land. Until then"—a curious reddish flame leaped in the black eyes—"until then I shall take what I want of this Western land to which I have come, and ill will befall the man who tries to balk my purpose."

He smiled again, and again Roscoe shivered.

"You are unconvinced," the turbaned man told Millie. "In your mind lurks the suspicion that the one who vanished was my cohort, acting under my orders to deceive and frighten you."

Millie stiffened, for that was the exact suspicion in her mind.

"I shall give you further proof, then."

The tall man whirled, took up the daily paper on Roscoe's desk, opened to a picture on the sporting page of the previous night's bout. A pointed nail touched a bald head in the foreground of the news photo.

"This man," Mr. Jinx said deeply. "I do not know his name. His face I can not see. I judge him to be important—"

"Important!" Roscoe choked. "That's Maxie Mullion. Why, he's boss of the whole East Side. He has a finger in more crooked—"

"A politician!" There was distant thunder in Mr. Jinx's voice.

"But look!" Roscoe began, worriedly. "You ain't—"

"Silence!"

Quivering like a nervous jellyfish, Roscoe gulped and subsided. Placing the picture upon the desk, Mr. Jinx folded his arms and concentrated as before upon his crystal ring. For a long moment he stood so, murmuring strange words. Then he looked up.

"It is done," he announced. "You will read about it presently. For the moment I shall bid you adieu. There are other calls to be made, and I must find a suitable office. I shall have many clients. Later I shall return, for the first payment of my fees."

Black eyes rested briefly on the locked safe behind Roscoe.

"Fifty thousand dollars will be the figure," Mr. Jinx announced, as though divining the exact amount in safekeeping there.

"You won't get it!" Millie stated crisply, as Roscoe Wentworth turned a pale green with despair. "We don't like crooks or chiselers around here, and you come under those headings, whether you're a yogi, a swami, a fakir, or a faker. Besides, that fifty grand is mine —Jimmy's, I mean. And if Roscoe lets you have it, we never will be able to collect it from him. So—anyway, don't come back, unless you're looking for trouble. You may be able to buffalo poor Roscoe, but I'm not a man, and I'm not buffaloed."

"It is true you are not a man." The turbaned one's voice was bland. "And the master who taught me gave urgent warning that women should be avoided, for they have no souls, and so many of my spells are impotent against them. But there are other minor powers that are effective, and I think I can make you believe in me. And at a later date, perhaps—more. If you will but look—"

He glanced at her shapely legs. Millie followed the direction of his gaze, and saw two long runs suddenly appear in the new, off-shade silk stockings that set off her legs so well. It was as though a sharp instrument had been drawn lightly down the threads, though she had felt nothing.

While Millie still stared in speechless horror at her stockings, Mr. Jinx turned to Roscoe Wentworth.

"Remember, I shall return," he warned, as he backed to the door.

"Why, you—" Millie spluttered, choked with wrath. "You—"

But the door closed and Mr. Jinx was gone before she could express herself.

FOR A TIME after the gentleman from the Orient vanished, relative silence held the office. Relative, because it was broken by the sharp click of Millie's high heels as she strode back and forth, sparks flashing from her eyes and electricity fairly crackling from her red curls. It was broken also by the asthmatic breathing of the Mauler and the Massacre, who still encumbered the floor, and by a low moaning, as of an animal dying in extreme agony somewhere distant, coming from Roscoe.

And presently it was broken additionally by shouts from the street of newsboys proclaiming an extra.

Ivan, the Massacre, groaned and got to his feet. The Mauler opened his eyes and also hoisted himself upright.

"Geez," the Massacre groaned, blinking about him, "I feel terrible. Did he t'row me outa th' ring?"

"Was we wrasslin'?" the Mauler inquired. "I dunno— I thought—"

"Get out!" Roscoe screamed, in high passion. "Bouncers, phooey! Bring me one of them extras, an' don't come back for a week!"

The two stampeded for the door. Millie turned away from the window and faced the fight promoter, whose cigar was a frayed stub.

"He went into a restaurant," she announced. "I watched. Well?"

"Well, what?" Roscoe groaned, all three chins quivering.

"Well, what do you intend to do?" Millie stamped her foot. "Pay, I suppose!"

Roscoe stabbed at his mouth with the cigar, and missed by two inches.

"But what can I do, Millie?" he groaned. "Against a guy like him? Mr. Jinx! If he was to get mad—" Roscoe shuddered, and swallowed hard. Then his gaze fell on his safe. That recalled

to mind the fifty grand Mr. Jinx was demanding. Roscoe Wentworth stiffened. There was nothing like the impending loss of a dollar to put starch in his spine.

"I got it!" he exclaimed, with relief. "It didn't any of it happen. He hypnotized us! Sure. He hypnotized me an' you an' Butch an' Ivan. Certainly I ain't gonna pay him anything. He—Well, what is it?"

The Russian Massacre, edging in, dropped a pink-sheet paper on the desk and scrambled out again.

"Just th' extra," he mumbled, and was gone, fleeing Roscoe's possible wrath. But Roscoe was paying him no more attention. His gaze was riveted upon the extra's headlines. His mouth opened. His cigar plopped to the floor.

"Glug!" he choked. *"Blup!"*

Millie looked over his shoulder at the headlines.

PROMINENT POLITICIAN VANISHES FROM BATH

Secretary Hears Scream, Rushes to Aid. Finds Bathroom Door Locked, Water Running, Max. J. Mullion Gone.

"Then it wasn't hypnotism after all," Millie remarked, in a cool voice. "He said he could do it just from a picture, too, and he did."

Roscoe sat down with a thud.

"Wh-what," he quavered, "can we d-do, Millie?"

"Do!" Millie snorted. "Fight back at him. If you don't, you'll be practically his slave. I suppose you realize that?"

"Y-yes," Roscoe gulped. "But fight him *h-how?*"

"When you're fighting fire, fight it with more fire," Millie said obscurely, a strange, cold gleam in her blue eyes. "Set a thief to catch a thief. You men! But if you think you're going to pay Jimmy's fifty thousand dollars to that . . . that swami, you've got three more thinks coming. Now I'm going out. I'll be back. You stay here."

But Roscoe Wentworth had no intention of leaving. Even as, with unexplained determination, Millie marched out, he was reaching for the bottle in his lower left-hand drawer. When he got it, he raised the neck to his lips and held it there. For he desperately wanted to erase the mental image that had come to him, of rapacious old Maxie Mullion wandering through eternity, waiting for the crack of doom, without even a bath towel to hide behind.

When Millie returned, two hours later, Mr. Roscoe Wentworth had consumed the bottle, without apparent effect. His features were flushed and perspiration spangled his brow and triplex chin, but he still was unable to forget how Little Pitty had vanished into a mustard-colored cloud, or to put away from himself the vision of Maxie Mullion—

"Well," Millie stated briskly, "after he ate, he went to call on Bennie Barber, Nat Miller, and Colonel Worth. I expect he'll be coming back here soon."

"I know." Roscoe's voice was the plaintive moan of a beaten man. "They called me up. Said he was there. Said he'd showed a few . . . tricks. Wanted to know if I was going to pay. I said 'yes.' He wants fifty Gs from them, too. And it's just a beginning. He let drop he was going to contact the mobs—like the Schwartz mob and the Dougal boys—about removals! Ten grand apiece. In a year he'll own this town. All of it. And anybody who holds out will go to that . . . that place. Oh, what

did I ever do to deserve this, Millie."

"Plenty," Millie stated, unfeelingly. "But that's not the point. You men! Sometimes I think all of you put together haven't as much brains or courage as just one woman. You'll let him walk all over you. You'll pay him what he wants, and be glad of the chance."

"Yeah," moaned Roscoe.

"You'll be afraid all the time."

"Yeah," Roscoe groaned.

"Your life won't be worth living."

"I know it, Millie," Roscoe said piteously. Then he looked up. Millie was gazing in a reflective manner down at the ugly runs in her stockings, and her lips were pursed.

"Millie!" Roscoe Wentworth exclaimed, clutching at a straw of hope. "You're thinking of something?"

Millie raised her eyes, so large, so blue, so innocent.

"Maybe I *could* think of something," she suggested, "if only I wasn't so upset. About Jimmy's contract, and the fifty thousand dollars."

She sighed. Roscoe sighed, too.

"You mean"—his tone was hollow—"if I was to say I'd tear up the contract and pay over the fifty thousand, you might be able to shoo off this Mr. Jinx?"

"I might," Millie answered. "I just barely might, Roscoe."

The plump little man expelled his breath gustily.

"If you would say twenty-five grand, Millie," he began, and then the opening of the office door broke off his words.

"Good afternoon," Mr. Jinx said, and his smile was catlike. "I have returned, as I promised. Shall we now discuss the business we left unfinished?"

The words were addressed to Roscoe, but his eyes were on Millie. Millie stared back for a moment, then dropped her gaze. The cat smile broadened. The black turbaned man advanced into the office, and indicated the pink sheet on Roscoe's desk.

"You have read. You are convinced?"

Roscoe gulped, but Millie spoke before he could answer.

"Of course not," she said stoutly. "I still think it's a trick. So does he. I'm not convinced you're not a phony one little bit."

"Ah." The dark eyes rested on her with a curious expression. "You are stubborn. What proof, then, will convince you?"

"To make somebody *I* pick out disappear," Millie answered.

Mr. Jinx leaned on his cobra cane, and seemed not displeased.

"You are a practical woman," he said, almost pleasantly. "And why not? Name the one, and limbo shall open for him. My powers are inexhaustible. One man more or less"—and the black eyes rested fleetingly on Roscoe, with so chill a menace that that plumb gentleman shivered violently—"means to me as little as the life or death of a fly."

"Well"—Millie hesitated now—"I . . . I don't, really—"

"You have chosen the test! Now name the one you wish the world relieved of!"

"ALL . . . ALL right," Millie gulped, and opened her handbag. From it she took a picture, frayed at the edges, with a crease down the middle, the corners bent, with soiled spots on the back. It was a blurred street scene with half a dozen figures in it.

"Th-this one," Millie stated, indicating a white splotch that was barely identifiable as the shoulder of a man in

a summer suit, all the rest of him being hidden by the surrounding crowds. "I don't know his right name, or where he lives, or anything. I tried to get a picture of him once, and this was all I could get. But he's a b-blackmailer, and very ruthless, and—"

"It is enough." Mr. Jinx took the picture, letting his fingers touch her hand as he did so, and a cold electric shock tingled up Millie's arm. "It will suffice. In a moment he will be no more."

Millie licked her lips.

"It's . . . sort of drastic," she said. "But . . . well, he deserves it."

"I am glad"—and Mr. Jinx's eyes held hers—"you have not a woman's usual squeamishness about such matters. And I think that when I have set your doubts at rest, we may become —better acquainted. Much, much better acquainted. You will—appreciate me more. Now—"

"Roscoe," Millie directed, her voice crisp again, "you'd better get out that fifty thousand dollars you have."

"Well—" Roscoe began, then catching the look in her eye, hurriedly swung around. "All right," he muttered, and spun the combination. "Here it is."

He laid five packets of bills on the desk, and prepared to close the steel door again, but Millie was too quick.

"Isn't that Jimmy Donegan's contract?" she cooed, snatching out a white, legal-looking document. "Jimmy wants to read it over later. All right, Roscoe, you can close it now."

Roscoe slammed the safe shut, angrily. Millie tucked the contract in her purse and faced Mr. Jinx.

The tall man in the black turban let his eyes traverse her visible charms again, lingeringly, then he took up the blurred photo.

"In a moment," he said vibrantly, "your enemy will leave this life for another, endless and unpleasant. Please be silent now."

Millie backed away toward the window, eyes wide. The turbaned one bowed his head, and concentrated upon the tiny globe of crystal in his ring. Roscoe Wentworth, baffled and bewildered, caught Millie's urgent gestures and tiptoed toward her.

Mr. Jinx, head bowed, was murmuring unknown words as, staring into the transparent depths of the bit of crystal, he summoned up the forces which blindly obeyed his orders.

Behind the turbaned man, in the corner of the big office, something stirred. Dust whirled, and Roscoe Wentworth almost let out a squeal of terror. Millie clapped her hand over his mouth just in time, and he was silent as that dark, shadowy mass in the corner, began to take form, began to spin, faster and faster, and spinning, swept down upon the motionless Mr. Jinx.

The one from the Orient had just time to wrench his mind from its task of directing terrible forces toward the unknown one and become aware of what was happening. But it was too late to stop the powers he had loosed. The spinning shadow touched him. Something like a terrific suction pulled at him and engulfed him. He had only time to know he had been tricked, and by a woman, and then he was hurtling through invisible portals into a world whose horrors he had never fully cared to think about—

Roscoe Wentworth stared at the spot where Mr. Jinx had been only a moment before, and still seemed to hear that last cry, coming as if from a land an immeasurable distance away.

Then, still strangling as he tried to get air into his lungs, he started forward. Millie was ahead of him, though, and reached the five packets of bills still lying on the desk first.

She tucked them into her purse as Roscoe drew up, baffled, and shook her head.

"You men!" her voice dripped scorn. "If it wasn't for me, he *would* have owned this city. And it was so simple, too. I just bought a camera when I left, and waited for him outside the restaurant. Then I followed him until he was in a crowd, and took a picture of his back. For five dollars the drug-store downstairs rushed me a print. I rubbed it and folded it to make it look old."

"A picture of himself!" Roscoe croaked. "You mean . . . you made him put the finger on himself, Millie?"

"Of course," Millie cooed. "He said his powers would work, even from a picture he couldn't recognize, didn't he? And proved it by that old Maxie Mullion. Any woman would have thought of that right away—especially when she saw he was sort of stuck on her. Only a man would think of giving him fifty thousand dollars when it was so easy to get rid of him forever. And another person's fifty thousand, at that!" Millie finished accusingly.

"But—" Roscoe Wentworth stammered. "But—"

"Oh, he won't come back," Millie assured him, heading for the door. "You heard him say himself it's a one-way passage. So you don't have to worry. Of course, in a way I'm sorry for him, because he did have interesting eyes. But wherever he is"—and Millie's eyes flashed fire for a moment—"he deserves it! Maybe he'll know better next time than to say a girl hasn't got a soul, and to put runs into the last pair of silk stockings she's got!"

Then the door slammed, and she was gone. To Jimmy. And shortly thereafter, to Texas.

After a time, Roscoe Wentworth's mouth stopped opening and closing like a fish's. He looked at his ravished safe and winced. Then, into his eyes came a gleam of the native guile which always enabled him to emerge triumphant from any situation.

For a moment Roscoe stared hard at the emptiness that a moment before had been Mr. Jinx. Then, cautiously skirting the spot, he gained his desk and his telephone, and dialed.

"Hello," he caroled. "Hello, Benny Barber? Is Nat Miller and Colonel Worth there. Lissen, about this Jinx fella. Yeah"—Roscoe looked quickly at the emptiness again, and decided to stretch matters a bit—"he's here now. I been talking him into a proposition. To go away and never bother us any more. For a hundred an' fifty grand he'll do it. I already put up fifty. If you fellas are interested, an' can raise th' other hundred, send it over to my office before five. An' I'll promise you'll never see him again. I'll take th' full responsibility. You think it's worth it? I think so, too! O. K. I'll be looking for your boy."

He put down the phone, elevated his feet, and reached for the cigar box. Then, lighting it, he deliberately blew strong smoke toward the spot where the gentleman in the black turban had last been seen and began to hum a glad little tune as he pondered on what he could give Millie and Jimmy as a wedding present, for which he was willing to spend as high as five dollars even.

THE END.

ARMAGEDDON

by FREDRIC BROWN

● **Concerning a small episode with a small boy, and a brand-new water pistol.**

Illustrated by Edd Cartier

It happened—of all places—in Cincinnati. Not that there is anything wrong with Cincinnati, save that it is not the center of the Universe, nor even of the State of Ohio. It's a nice old

town and, in its way, second to none. But even its Chamber of Commerce would admit that it lacks cosmic significance. It must have been mere coincidence that Gerber the Great—what a name!—was playing Cincinnati when things slipped elsewhere.

Of course, if the episode had become known, Cincinnati would be the most famous city of the world, and little Herbie would be hailed as a modern St. George and get more acclaim, even, than a quiz kid. But no member of that audience in the Bijou Theater remembers a thing about it. Not even little Herbie Westerman, although he had the water pistol to show for it.

He wasn't thinking about the water pistol in his pocket as he sat looking up at the prestidigitator on the other side of the footlights. It was a new water pistol, bought en route to the theater when he'd inveigled his parents into a side trip into the five-and-dime on Vine Street, but at the moment, Herbie was much more interested in what went on upon the stage.

His expression registered qualified approval. The front-and-back palm was no mystery to Herbie. He could do it himself. True, he had to use pony-sized cards that came with his magic set and were just the right size for his nine-year-old hands. And true, anyone watching could see the card flutter from the front-palm position to the back as he turned his hands. But that was a detail.

He knew, though, that front-and-back palming seven cards at a time required great finger strength as well as dexterity, and that was what Gerber the Great was doing. There wasn't a telltale click in the shift, either, and Herbie nodded approbation. Then he remembered what was coming next.

He nudged his mother and said, "Ma, ask Pop if he's gotta extra handkerchief."

Out of the corner of his eye, Herbie saw his mother turn her head and in less time than it would take to say "Presto" Herbie was out of his seat and skinning down the aisle. It had been, he felt, a beautiful piece of misdirection and his timing had been perfect.

It was at this stage of the performance —which Herbie had seen before, alone— that Gerber the Great asked if some little boy from the audience would step to the stage. He was asking it now.

Herbie Westerman had jumped the gun. He was well in motion before the magician had asked the question. At the previous performance, he'd been a bad tenth in reaching the steps from aisle to stage. This time he'd been ready, and he hadn't taken any chances with parental restraint. Perhaps his mother would have let him go and perhaps not; it had seemed wiser to see that she was looking the other way. You couldn't trust parents on things like that. They had funny ideas sometimes.

"—will please step up on the stage?" And Herbie's foot touched the first of the steps upward right smack on the interrogation point of that sentence. He heard the disappointed scuffle of other feet behind him, and grinned smugly as he went on up across the footlights.

IT WAS the three-pigeon trick, Herbie knew from the previous performance, that required an assistant from the audience. It was almost the only trick he hadn't been able to figure out. There *must*, he knew, have been a concealed compartment somewhere in that box, but where it could be he couldn't even guess. By this time he'd be holding the box himself. If from that range, he couldn't spot the gimmick, he'd better go back to stamp collecting.

He grinned confidently up at the magician. Not that he, Herbie, would give him away. He was a magician, too, and he understood that there was a freemasonry among magicians and that one never gave away the tricks of another.

He felt a little chilled, though, and the grin faded as he caught the magician's eyes. Gerber the Great, at close range, seemed much older than he had seemed from the other side of the footlights. And somehow different. Much taller, for one thing.

Anyway, here came the box for the pigeon trick. Gerber's regular assistant was bringing it in on a tray. Herbie looked away from the magician's eyes and he felt better. He remembered, even, his reason for being on the stage. The servant limped. Herbie ducked his head to catch a glimpse of the under side of the tray, just in case. Nothing there.

Gerber took the box. The servant limped away and Herbie's eyes followed him suspiciously. Was the limp genuine or was it a piece of misdirection?

The box folded out flat as the proverbial pancake. All four sides hinged to the bottom, the top hinged to one of the sides. There were little brass catches.

Herbie took a quick step back so he could see behind it while the front was displayed to the audience. Yet he saw it now. A triangular compartment built against one side of the lid, mirror-covered, angles calculated to achieve invisibility. Old stuff. Herbie felt a little disappointed.

The prestidigitator folded the box, mirror-concealed compartment inside. He turned slightly. "Now, my fine young man—"

WHAT HAPPENED in Tibet wasn't the only factor; it was merely the final link of a chain.

The Tibetian weather had been unusual that week, highly unusual. It had been warm. More snow succumbed to the gentle warmth than had melted in more years than man could count. The streams ran high, they ran wide and fast.

Along the streams some prayer wheels whirled faster than they had ever whirled. Others, submerged, stopped altogether. The priests, knee-deep in the cold water, worked frantically, moving the wheels nearer to shore where again the rushing torrent would turn them.

There was one small wheel, a very old one that had revolved without cease for longer than any man knew. So long

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had it been there that no living lama recalled what had been inscribed upon its prayer plate, nor what had been the purpose of that prayer.

The rushing water had neared its axle when the lama Klarath reached for it to move it to safety. Just too late. His foot slid in the slippery mud and the back of his hand touched the wheel as he fell. Knocked loose from its moorings, it swirled down with the flood, rolling along the bottom of the stream, into deeper and deeper waters.

While it rolled, all was well.

The lama rose, shivering from his momentary immersion, and went after other of the spinning wheels. What, he thought, could one small wheel matter? He didn't know that—now that other links had broken—only that tiny thing stood between Earth and Armageddon.

The prayer wheel of Wangur Ul rolled on, and on, until—a mile farther down—it struck a ledge, and stopped. That was the moment.

"And now, my fine young man—"

Herbie Westerman—we're back in Cincinnati now—looked up, wondering why the prestidigitator had stopped in midsentence. He saw the face of Gerber the Great contorted as though by a great shock. Without moving, without changing, his face began to change. Without appearing different, it became different.

Quietly, then, the magician began to chuckle. In the overtones of that soft laughter was all of evil. No one who heard it could have doubted who he was. No one did doubt. The audience, every member of it, knew in that awful moment who stood before them, knew it—even the most skeptical among them—beyond shadow of doubt.

No one moved, no one spoke, none drew a shuddering breath. There are things beyond fear. Only uncertainty causes fear, and the Bijou Theater was filled, then, with a dreadful certainty.

The laughter grew. Crescendo, it reverberated into the far dusty corners of the gallery. Nothing—not a fly on the ceiling—moved.

Satan spoke.

"I thank you for your kind attention to a poor magician." He bowed, ironically low. "The performance is ended."

He smiled. "All performances are ended."

Somehow the theater seemed to darken, although the electric lights still burned. In dead silence, there seemed to be the sound of wings, leathery wings, as though invisible Things were gathering.

On the stage was a dim red radiance. From the head and from each shoulder of the tall figure of the magician there sprang a tiny flame. A naked flame.

There were other flames. They flickered along the proscenium of the stage, along the footlights. One sprang from the lid of the folded box little Herbie Westerman still held in his hands.

Herbie dropped the box.

Did I mention that Herbie Westerman was a Safety Cadet? It was purely a reflex action. A boy of nine doesn't know much about things like Armageddon, but Herbie Westerman should have known that water would never have put out that fire.

But, as I said, it was purely a reflex action. He yanked out his new water pistol and squirted it at the box of the pigeon trick. And the fire *did* vanish, even as a spray from the stream of water ricocheted and dampened the trouser leg of Gerber the Great, who had been facing the other way.

There was a sudden, brief, hissing

sound. The lights were growing bright again, and all the other flames were dying, and the sound of wings faded, blended into another sound—the rustling of the audience.

The eyes of the prestidigitator were closed. His voice sounded strangely strained as he said: "This much power I retain. None of you will remember this."

Then, slowly, he turned and picked up the fallen box. He held it out to Herbie Westerman. "You must be more careful, boy," he said. "Now hold it so."

He tapped the top lightly with his wand. The door fell open. Three white pigeons flew out of the box. The rustle of their wings was not leathery.

HERBIE WESTERMAN'S father came down the stairs and, with a purposeful air, took his razor strop off the hook on the kitchen wall.

Mrs. Westerman looked up from stirring the soup on the stove. "Why, Henry," she asked, "are you really going to punish him with that—just for squirting a little water out of the window of the car on the way home?"

Her husband shook his head grimly. "Not for that, Marge. But don't you remember we bought him that water gun on the way downtown, and that he wasn't near a water faucet after that? Where do you think he filled it?"

He didn't wait for an answer. "When we stopped in at the cathedral to talk to Father Ryan about his confirmation, that's when the little brat filled it. Out of the baptismal font! Holy water he uses in his water pistol!"

He clumped heavily up the stairs, strop in hand.

Rhythmic thwacks and wails of pain floated down the staircase. Herbie—who had saved the world—was having his reward.

THE END.

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ASTOUNDING

SCIENCE-FICTION AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

TAKE MY DRUM TO ENGLAND—

by NELSON S. BOND

The legend of a Drum of long ago that beats again—and serves again—in today's hour of danger.

Illustrated by Schneeman

It wasn't so much the retreating that got Thompson. That was bad enough. But it was leaving the heavy ordnance; that was what griped his guts. Even grenaded tanks, damaged cannon, stripped caissons and lorries were valuable booty to the steel-starved Heinies; they would melt down what weapons they could not repair, recast them, and some day use English arms to war on English people.

But it was unavoidable, just as this dogged retreat was unavoidable. The collapse of the Belgian left wing gave the trapped B. E. F. bitter alternatives, flight or surrender—and they had already had a bellyful of the second in Leopold's sudden, devastating capitulation.

Above him, high shells screamed and whined, unseen behind the slow, dripping pall of gray mist and the blacker smudge from a hundred unfought fires now tightening like an eager, crimson claw about Dunkerque. Overhead, the roar of airplane motors merged in thudding cacaphony with the bite and chatter of machine guns; pompoms fretted raggedly from the shelter of emplacements about him. Nowhere was there a moment of silence or rest for ears beaten sickeningly acute by an interminable torrent of sound.

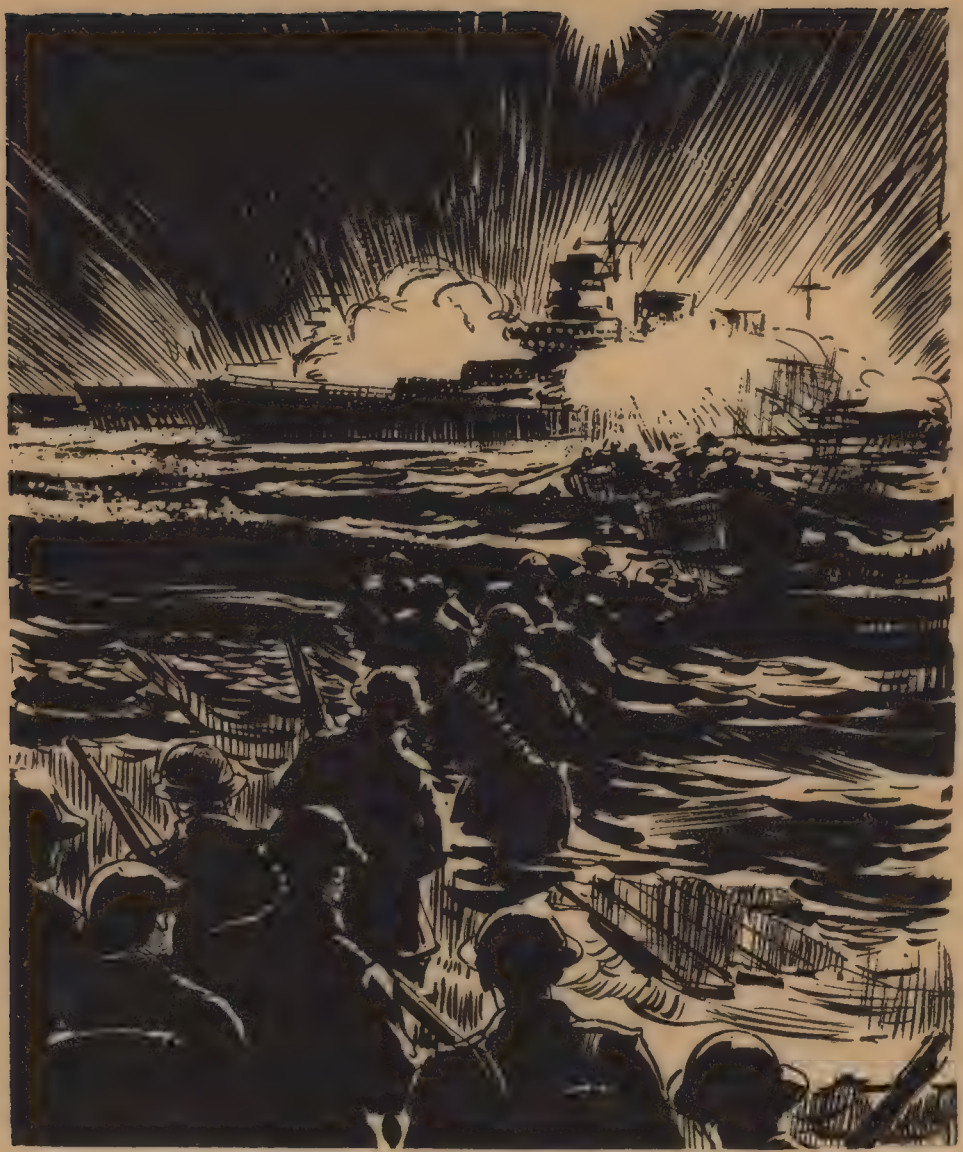
How long his world had been like this, Thompson no longer knew. Days—weeks—he could not remember. He had not slept for centuries; he had not shaved nor washed in an æon. There had been no canteen since the battle began; he had long since eaten the last of his emergency rations.

But one supply line had been maintained. In spite of everything, an inexhaustible stream of ammunition fought its way up from behind to feed hot, hungry guns. Fritz was paying in human coinage, Thompson thought grimly, for every inch of terrain reluctantly granted by the British. He had seen with his own eyes the havoc created amongst fast, tiny advance tanks by Allied artillery, had seen decimated foray parties consolidate new gains behind gray-green breastworks that still bled.

Yet they still advanced. And now—

And now there was a messenger wrenching his bicycle to a stop beside the barbed nest which was Thompson's post, waving, motioning, shouting words half indistinguishable to tumult-deafened ears.

The word "beach" was distinct, and that made the entire message clear enough. It meant that Thompson now left the ranks of those dwindling few who, under cover of an incessant bar-



There was hell in the air and on the water and in the water that lapped Dunkerque's beach—

rage from the navy guns, maintained a defensive rear-guard action for their retreating comrades, and became himself one of those who fled.

Others about him were rising from strategic covers; from doorways and rude barricades and such shelters filtered a slow stream of weary troops. Thompson knew a vague wonder that this orderless battalion should yet uphold order in its forced withdrawal. Wonder and strengthening pride. In this company were soldiers of a dozen divisions, many leaderless, yet there was

little confusion and no panic. Blue, gray and khaki uniforms formed one ordered column, headed by officers who gave commands in different tongues.

They were no longer Britons or Frenchmen, Belgians, Dutch or Norwegians. They were Allied soldiers, fighting in an allied cause.

Thompson found a place in the column. Overhead the sky droned with the hum of invisible motors; the coughing of cannon from the nearby shore was like the thunder of massive waves. Not all the defenders fell in. A skeleton force remained to cover this last retreat; they stuck to their posts with full knowledge of what must follow. One of these found Thompson's eye upon him, parted stubbled lips in a grin, and gestured with closed fist, thumb stiffly erect.

Thompson answered the gesture in kind.

"Thumbs up!"

Then a command, and the motley column shrugged into motion—

THE MEN on the front defense line had not been kept in ignorance as to their purpose; word had sifted to them of the miracle transpiring on Dunkerque beach. But somehow the legend of that mass embarkation had seemed to Thompson a far implausibility until he saw it with his own eyes.

The city of Dunkerque was a smoking ruin. Thompson found no reminder in this shell-warped town of the Dunkerque he had once visited in the happy days before Warsaw. Rosendaël was a suburb peopled with ghosts who peered from behind shuttered windows, ghosts of women and children and aged men wakened from hiding by the dry *sough-sough* of marching feet.

The once-wide, well-paved streets were crater-pocked where bombs had dropped and mountainous with crumbled debris where shells had found a mark. Unchecked fires had withered whole rows of deep-rooted homes. In the Place Jean Bart the statue of David d'Angers stared fiercely, defiantly, out upon a vista of chaos. The belfry of St. Eloi was fallen, and one priceless cornice of the chapel of Notre Dame des Dunes, bomb-struck, had sheered away, exposing the sacred shrine—anomalously chaste and quiet in the murderous heat of battle.

But it was not these sights that quickened Thompson to new life. This was war; this was war's normal, wasteful toll. It was his first sight of the sea that wakened in his throat an echo of the murmur that swelled through the column of marching men.

The sea—and the fleet!

Short months ago this had been a brave harbor with docks and quays beside which great ships might make mooring. Now it had felt the force of the Nazi air armada. Its docks were ribbons of shredded timber, its miles-long quays broken and bent as if crumpled in a giant fist. The harbor channel bristled with the shards of sunken craft; not the most agile merchantman could thread that unnatural shoal to take aboard a human cargo.

And yet the evacuation was taking place!

From north and south and east, from St. Pol-sur-Mer and blazing Malo-les-Bains, from the canal banks and the low hills, came the retreating columns. Not in confusion nor in rank disorder, but in smooth, accomplished withdrawal, their lines converging on the open beach.

There, sheltered by rolling dunes to the northward, the column marched out into the waiting sea. Their line was a

gigantic "S," writhing through the shallows to where, in the gray distance, a galaxy of craft stood by to take them on.

To north and south, so far as the eye could see, in two unyielding lines stood the warships of the fleet. Grim, gaunt bulldogs of the sea, now welded prow to stern. And on each fighting vessel the guns had been so faced as to form a corridor between the rows. Skyward boomed the cannon; their ceaseless bombardment wove an arch of raking cross-fire past which not even a gull might have flown.

And in the broad avenue of safety thus created, the rescue vessels plied tirelessly back and forth, on each trip scooping another handful of the human flotsam that breasted the gray sea.

Beside Thompson, someone murmured, and it was young Owens, who—or so Thompson had heard—was a poet of sorts. A sort of second Brooke, perhaps, though he didn't much look the part now, what with that week's growth of beard and that filthy bandage about his head.

"And they said the spirit of Nelson was dead," said Owens. "The spirit of Nelson and Drake—"

Then there was no time for reply, for the order was still forward; the sand gritted beneath his boots, the water was icy cold about his ankles and calves and thighs.

WHEN HIS BRAIN was so benumbed that it quite forgot the cold, when he could no longer remember why or how he had come here, or any world other than this breast-high grave of water into which, forward, he endlessly wallowed, Thompson's eyes lent him a sudden, startling knowledge. He had reached the tip of the sea-groping column! Somehow, few by few, the men in the queue before him had melted into the bee swarm of yachts, dories, skiffs, shuttling back and forth beneath the curtain of gunfire; soon, now, it would be his turn!

The realization was a shock, stirring Thompson into his first considered action for hours. He turned and looked back at the falling city, saw that the thick, black, greasy smoke was now a solid wall about Dunkerque, and that an ever-narrowing band of flame tightened about the town, spiraling scarlet fingers into the creeping dusk.

The sea, which had been leaden-gray, was now a dull jet-purple, and the black night sky pressed heavily upon the lingering line of horizon daylight. The coughing naval guns spat salvos of orange flame, black hulks loomed suddenly in brief relief, were swallowed in instant darkness; rain began to fall, its freshness warm and sweet upon Thompson's salty, blue-cold lips.

The last thin line of light snuffed out, and it was starless night.

For the first time a sort of panic swept over him. A lost, cold, lonely terror. Muted flashes dotted the water before him, behind him a voice moaned softly, and once there was a muffled splashing of oars at his side, yet his straining eyes saw nothing. He cried aloud, his voice strange and harsh to his ears.

"Here!"

Then a hand groping at his arm, a familiar voice.

"Thompson? That you, old boy?"

It was Owens. His nearness, the commonplace sanity of his question, calmed Thompson. It was so weird and silly and brave; so altogether damned British. For the emotion he showed they might have met at Piccadilly, not

breast-deep in water where Dunkerque basin joined the choppy Channel rip.

"Right," said Thompson. "Bloody cold, what?"

"Filthy. We're almost out, though. Thumbs up!"

"Thumps up!" said Thompson.

It was as if their voices were a beacon in the dark emptiness. Something brushed Thompson's shoulder, a grating oarlock whimpered, a dim flash beam dazzled him momentarily, and warm, strong hands were beneath his armpits.

" 'Ere you are, mitey! A little 'oist does it. Up you come, now!"

After the swaying sea, the dory's boards were hard and firm and wonderful. He lay there, panting heavily, not hearing the whispers about him nor feeling the bitter cold, the damp, bruising crush of other bodies clambering aboard. He hardly knew when the little boat, so laden that its gunwales cupped the breakers, heeled slowly on the last leg to safety.

He only knew the journey took too long, the rowers were making heavy weather of their task. The dory wallowed in the trough, gulping water with each forward surge. More than thirty souls crammed space planned for a score. There was barely room for the oarsmen to pull. Men began bailing with pans and trench helmets and cupped hands, but the rain and washing breakers laughed at their efforts. Slowly but inevitably the dory dipped deeper, heavier.

And the fleet too far away to help. Thompson felt a slow sense of despair creeping over him. This had been a losing fight from the beginning. Dunkerque had been a lost cause, the mass evacuation a madman's dream. Even the gods of sun and sky pledged the swastika banner; even the god of the sea, whose realm had been Britain's pride for more than four centuries. Still he bailed; he did not know his hands were cracked and cold and bleeding.

The thunder of the guns rolled tumultuously; once a great, winged bird of prey burst into flame high above them, flashed like a meteor into the stifling caldron of the sea, hissing in stricken agony. Far across the water a sailboat limned its brief red outline against the sky, spewing black motes into the water above it.

Still he bailed.

And then suddenly there was no longer need of his efforts. A last great breaker welled over the dory's prow. A score of voices lifted as one; the small boat trembled and rolled. Struggling bodies returned to the waters from which they had been taken—but this time there was no sand bottom on which to stand. Strange hands clutched at Thompson as if he were a buoy; he broke free, struck out for the far safety of the fleet, not hoping to make his goal. Choking for air, he gulped a lungful of water; he strangled and spat. Salt was bitter in his throat.

He felt himself sinking, and a strange lethargy was upon him. He found himself wondering if this were to be the end, if thus he were to escape the Dunkerque shambles! Once more he fought his way to the surface, essayed a few feeble strokes. There was a maddening, dull throbbing in his ears; like the distant roll of summer thunder—or the rumbling of a far and ancient drum.

THEN the miracle was complete, for once again there was a ship beside him. Only this time it was a tiny sailing vessel. Its longboats were down, its sailors hauling in the survivors of Thomp-

son's sunken dory. The refugees, at last, had found a haven.

What happened in the next little while was confused and uncertain. There were great, rough blankets around him, cutting the chill from aching bones; there was grog, hot and fragrant in huge pewter mugs. Then escape from the sea, the rain and the night into a bunk room below decks; a wee cabin ill-lighted by a greasecup lamp with floating wick.

Thompson slumped into a bunk. He must have dropped asleep, then, for when a hand shook him some time later the concussive bellow of cannon fire had faded into a dull, soft silence broken only by the groan of straining planks and the shatter of waves on ancient, sturdy wood.

It was Owens who had awakened him. An Owens who was no longer grimy and bearded, but fresh and clean and eager. The bandage was gone from his head, and his voice was tense with excitement.

"How can you sleep at a time like this, old fellow? Come on deck and watch. It's marvelous! Just like that old poem of Newbolt's—remember?" His eyes shone; he quoted:

"Yarnder lumes the island, yarnder lie the ships,
Wi' sailor lads a-dancin' heel an' toe,
An' the shore lights flashin', an' the night tide dashin'—

"Only the sailor lads aren't a-dancin' heel an' toe—yet. But they will be when they know—"

Thompson said, "We're coming in to England?"

"Dover. Come along and watch!"

They went up, Owens leading, Thompson following; it was still black night when they reached the rail, but it had stopped raining. The great, near stars of early summer laid a frost of

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faint, unearthly silver on the ship. The port of Dover was a rising smudge, marked by the dimmest of beacons. And from the mainland Thompson heard, as before, a dull and drumlike rolling.

About him, wraithlike in the gloom, huddled the men who had been his companions at Dunkerque and in the dory. A silence was upon them as they watched the shore loom nearer. Somewhere abaft a slow winch moaned, ghost figures in rolled pantaloons labored at tasks unfathomable.

From somewhere high in the rigging came the warning cry of the lookout; a deep voice bellowed answer in a sturdy Devon accent; wood screeled on wood, sheets flapped and wove and bellied again to the wind.

Thompson said shakenly, "We're safe, Owens. It's a miracle. I never expected to see England again."

"He promised," said Owens softly, incomprehensibly. "He said he would be waiting 'till the great Armadas come.'" He lifted his face to the stars. "Hear his drum? There was need of him, the waiting drum was struck, and he has come—as he said he would. Remember, Thompson? He said:

"Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore,
Strike et when your powder's runnin' low;
If the foe sights Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven,
An' drum them up the Channel as we drummed them long ago—"

"Who said?" demanded Thompson. "What are you talking about? I don't understand—"

Then suddenly there were footsteps approaching him; the firm, crisp grate of leather on salt-crusted boards, and a Devon voice, friendly but regretful in his ears.

"There has been a mistake here, soldier lad; ye ha' no place aboard this ship. The shore is tha place, with tha fellows."

And how it happened, Thompson did not rightly know, but of a sudden there was no longer strong planking beneath his feet; there was once more the salt and wet and frightful cold of tossing Channel waters. He cried out loudly, and he glimpsed, for an instant, the white, startled face of Owens, leaning over the rail above him.

Beside Owens stood another figure, that of the captain of the sailing vessel. His cheeks were lean and strong and bearded, and his eyes were filled with a great pity, but a great power, too. And he cried a message to Thompson, his clarion words half drowned in the rolling crescendo of drums from the nearby shore.

"Tell England to be of good cheer!" he said. "Tell England all will be well with her!"

Then he raised an arm in salute. The ship splashed into the belly of a black-green trough, heeling about; for a second, cold starlight glinted on its stern—then vessel and captain and crew alike were gone.

Thompson's flailing arm met and clung to a drifting solid, and life was a hot spark within his frozen body. His strident cry lifted again and yet again. The probing finger of a searchlight, then a small boat found him—

WHEN THEY had parted his cold blue lips, poured hot brandy between his locked teeth, Thompson tried to give them his message. His voice was like the grating of a blade on paper as he gasped the words.

"All will be well . . . with England."

The young doctor, red-eyed with fa-

tigue, nodded and motioned him to silence.

"That's right, soldier. Now rest a while." To his companion he murmured, "Keep him in hot blankets. He's that far from pneumonia. He must have caught it bad."

"Rotten bad. Floated in on an overturned dory; the only one of his boatful who made it. Hours in the Channel. Poor devil."

"The drums—" said Thompson.

"Of course, soldier. Try to sleep now." The chap in white shook his head. "Exposure. Cold. Surf beating in his ears for hours. No wonder he hears drums."

Thompson stirred fretfully. His mind was beclouded by alternate tempests of heat and cold that swelled over him in fierce, devastating waves; the voices of his friends were lost in thin, singing distances. And it angered him that he could not seem to make them understand.

He wanted rest. But he could not rest until he had told them of the boat that brought him here. He had to make them understand about the boat and its captain. He must let them know the drum had not been struck in vain—that he had seen the stern plate of that ship as it vanished Channelward, and that the legend gilded there had spelled *Golden Hynde*—

He tried again to bear the message given him.

"Tell England to be of good cheer," he said. "'All will be well with her,' *he* said."

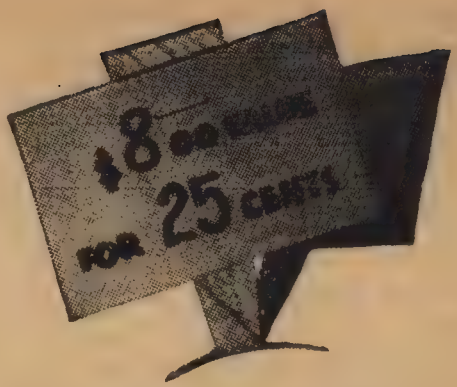
"Who said, soldier?"

"It was . . . Drake. He has come back . . . as he promised he would."

"Fever," said the young doctor, and laid a cool hand on Thompson's forehead. "He's delirious, poor devil. Keep him well covered—"

THE END.

UN—9h



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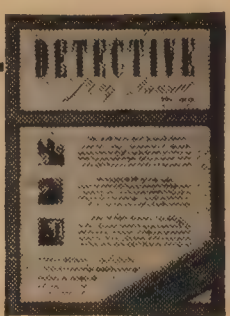

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THE GOLDEN EGG

by THEODORE STURGEON

● The Golden Egg was ancient beyond Man's understanding—and wanted a measure of amusement in Man's small world—

Illustrated by Orban

WHEN time itself was half its present age, and at an unthinkable distance, and in an unknowable dimension, he was born.

He left his world so long before he came to earth that even he did not know how long he had been in space. He had lived so long on that world that even he could not remember what he had been before his science changed his race.

Though we can never know where his world lay in space, we know that it was in a system of two mighty suns, one blue and one yellow. His planet had an atmosphere and a great civilization and science beyond humanity's most profound visions. He spoke little of his planet because he hated it.

Too perfect. Their sciences fed them and controlled the etheric currents that gave them comfort, and carried them from place to place, and taught them, and cared for them in every way. For many æons there were members set apart to care for the machines, but in time they died out, for they were no longer needed. There was no struggle and no discomfort and no disease. There were, therefore, no frontiers, no goals, no incentives, and eventually, no possible achievements, save one—the race itself, and the changes possible to it.

Step by step the thing was done. Limbs were not needed, and wasted away from long-lived, lazy bodies, and were replaced, redesigned, or forgotten. And as the death of an inhabitant became more rare, rarer still became the advent of new life. It was a mighty race, a powerful race, a most highly civilized race, and—a sterile race.

The refinement went on endlessly, as occasional flashes of initiative appeared down through the ages. What was unnecessary was discarded, and what could be conceivably desirable was attained, until all that was left was a few thousand glittering golden ovoids, supermetal casings, functionally streamlined, beautiful and bored. It was life of a sort. The beings could move as and if they wished, through air or time or space. Everything was done for them automatically; each was self-sufficient and unco-operative. Brains they were, armored in a substance indestructible by anything less powerful than the heat of the mightiest of suns, or by the supercosmic forces each could unleash at will.

But there was no will. There was nothing for them. They hung in small groups conversing of things unimaginable to us, or they lay on the plains of their world and lived within themselves until a few short æons buried them, all uncaring, in rubble and rock. Some asked to be killed and were killed. Some were murdered by others because of quibblings in remote philosophic discussions. Some hurled themselves into the blue sun, starved for any new sensation, knowing they would find there an in-

stant's agony. Most simply vegetated. One came away.

He stopped, in a way known to him —stopped in space so that his world and solar system and corner of the cosmos fell away from him and left him free. And then he traveled.

He traveled to many places and in many ways, as his whims dictated. He extended himself at times around the curve of curved space, until the ends of him were diametrically opposite; and then he would contract in a straight line, reforming countless millions of light years from the point of his extension; and his speed then was, of course, the speed of light cubed. And sometimes he dropped from his level in time to the

level below, and would then lie poised and thoughtful during one cycle, until he was returned to the higher level again; and it was thus he discovered the nature of time, which is a helical band, ever revolving, never moving in its superspace. And sometimes he would move slowly, drifting from one gravitic pull to another, searching disinterestedly for the unusual. It was in such a period that he came to earth.

A GOOSE found him. He lay in some bushes by a country road, distantly observing the earth and analyzing its elements, and the goose was a conventional one and blindly proud of its traditional silliness. He ignored it when it approached him and when it rapped his shell curiously; but when it turned him over with its beak he felt that it was being discourteous. He seized it with a paralyzing noose of radiations, quickly read its miniscule mind for a way to annoy it, and then began pulling its tail feathers out to see how it would react. It reacted loudly.

Now it so happened that Christopher Innes was on that country road, bringing the young un home from Sunday school. Chris was an embittered and cynical mortal, being a normal twelve-year-old who had just learned that increasing age and masculinity made for superiority, and was about to be a 'teenager and find out differently. The young un was his five-year-old sister, of whom he was jealous and protective. She had silly ideas. She was saying:

"But they *tol'* me in school last week, Chris, so it mus' be so, so there. The prince came into the palace an' everyone was asleep, an' he came to the room where *she* was, an' she was asleep, too, but he kissed her an' she woke up, and then everyone—"

"Aw, shut your fontanel," said Chris, who had heard that babies shut their fontanels when they started to grow, though he didn't know what one was. "You believe everything you hear. Ol' Mr. Becker tol' me once I could catch a bird by putting salt on its tail, an' then whaled me for loadin' up a twelve-gauge shotgun with rock salt and knockin' off three of his Rhode Island Reds. They tell you that stuff so they'll have a chance to hit you afterward."

"I don't care, so there," pouted the young un. "My teacher wouldn't hit me for b'lieving her."

"Somebody will," Chris said darkly. "What's all that racket, I wonder? Sounds like a duck caught in a fox trap. Le's go see."

Chris stopped to pick up a piece of stick in case he had a trap to pry open, and the young un ran ahead. When he reached her he found her jumping up and down and clapping her hands and gurgling, "I told you so! I told you so!" which is the most annoying thing any woman can say to any man.

"You tol' me whut?" he asked, and she pointed. He saw a large white goose digging its feet into the ground, straining to get away from its invisible bonds, while behind it lay a glittering ovoid. As they watched, a tail feather detached itself from its anchorage and fell beside two of its prototypes on the ground.

"Chee!" Chris breathed.

"They tol' me that story, too!" chortled the young un. "About the goose that laid the golden egg. Oh, Chris, if we take that goose home an' keep um, we'll be rich an' I can have a pony an' a hundred dolls an'—"

"Chee," Chris said again, and gingerly picked up the golden egg. As he did so the goose was released suddenly,

and its rooted claws shot it forward face-first into the earth, where it lay stunned and quonking dismally. As only a farm child can, the young un caught its legs together and picked it up in her arms.

"We're rich!" breathed Chris, and laughed. Then he remembered his assertions and frowned. "Aw, it didn't lay no egg. Someone lost it an' this ol' goose jus' found it here."

"It's the golden-egg goose! It is, too!" shrilled the young un.

Chris spat on the egg and rubbed it with his cuff. "It's sure pretty," he said half to himself, and tossed it into the air. He must have stood there open-mouthed for two full minutes with his hands out, because it never came down. It vanished.

They found out later that the goose was a gander. Neither of them ever quite got over it.

"IT MIGHT be interesting," thought the armored brain to himself as he lay in the stratosphere, "to be a biped like that for a while. I believe I will try it. I wonder which of the two is the more intelligent—the feathered or unfeathered ones?" He pondered a moment over this nice distinction and then remembered that the boy had armed himself with a stick, while the goose had not. "They are a little ungainly," he thought, then shrugged mentally. "I shall be one of those."

He plummeted down to earth, braked off and shot along just over the surface until he came to a small town. A movement in a tiny alley caught his attention; a man there was leveling a gun at another across the street. Unseen, the being from space flashed between them, and his path intersected that of the bullet. It struck his smooth side and neither left a mark nor changed his course by a thousandth of a degree as it spun into the street four feet below him. The intended victim went his way unharmed, and the man in the alley swore and went to his room to take his gun apart wonderingly. He had never missed a shot like that before!

Just outside the town, the brain found what he had been looking for—a field under which was a huge mass of solid rock. He came to rest in the field and dropped from sight, sinking through sod and earth and granite as if it had been water; and in a matter of minutes he had cut himself a great underground chamber in the rock, with high arched walls and a vaulted ceiling and a level, polished floor. Hovering for a moment in midair, he tested the surrounding countryside for its exact chemical content, sending out delicate high-frequency beams, adjusting them fractionally for differences in molecular vibrations. The presence of a certain fine harmonic at any given frequency indicated to him the exact location of the elements he needed. There were not many. These bipeds were hardly complex.

"A type—a type," he thought. "I must have something to work from. I gather that these creatures are differentiated from each other in certain ways."

He slipped up through the roof of his chamber and went back to the town, where he found a busy corner and hid up under an eave, where he could watch the people passing.

"Those smaller ones must be the males," he ruminated, "the ones that strut and slink and apparently do little work and wear all those blatant colors and so ridiculously accentuate the color of the oral orifice. And the larger, muscular ones, I suppose, are females. How drab."

He projected a beam that would carry thought impulses to him. It touched the mind of a young man who was mooning after a trim blonde just ahead of him. He was a hesitant and shy young man, and a passionate one, and the battle he fought within himself, between his inclinations and his diffidence, almost dislodged the creature in the eaves.

"Whew!" thought the golden ovoid. "An emotional monstrosity! And it appears that I was a little mistaken about males and females. How very quaint!

"I shall be one of the males," he decided at length.

Wisely, he searched about until he found a girl who was suffering from every "osis" in the advertisements, as well as an inferiority complex, acne, bunions and tone-deafness, knowing that her idea of an ideal man would be really something. Inserting gentle thought tendrils into her mind, he coaxed her to dream a lovely dream of her ideal man as she walked along, and carefully filed away all the essentials, disregarding only the passion the dream man showered on the poor starved creature. Enveloped by the dream he had induced, she walked into the path of an automobile and was rather badly hurt, which was all right, because she later married the driver.

THE BRAIN sped back to the laboratory, nursing his mental picture of a muscular, suave, urbane, sophisticated and considerate demigod, and began to assemble his machinery.

Now the brain had no powers, as such. What he had was *control*. The engineer of a twenty-car train would be stupid to even dream about hurling such a train at a hundred and twenty miles an hour along a track if he had to do so himself with his own physical powers. But with his controls, the thing is easy. In the case of the brain, his controls were as weak compared with the final results of it as is a man's arm compared with the two-thousand horsepower delivered by a locomotive. But the brain knew the true nature of space; that it is not empty, but a mass of balanced forces.

Press two pencils together, end to end. As long as the pressure is even and balanced, the effect is the same as if the pencils were just resting their ends together. Now get some tiny force to press on the point where the pencils come together. They snap out of line; they deliver a powerful resultant, out of all proportion to the push which upset the equilibrium, and you probably break a knuckle. The resultant is at right angles to the original equalized forces; it goes just so far and then the forces come together in equilibrium again, knuckles notwithstanding.

We live in a resilient universe; the momentary upset is negligible, since the slack is taken up to infinity. Such a control had the brain from space. Any and every form of energy—and matter is energy—was his to control, to any degree. The resultant from one tiny upset balance could be used to upset another; and a chain like this could be extended ad infinitum. Fortunately, the brain knew how not to make mistakes!

He made his apparatus quickly and efficiently. A long table; tanks and small bins of pure elements; a highly complex machine with projectors and reflectors capable of handling any radiation that can be indicated on a circular spectrum, for compounding and conditioning the basic materials. The machine had no switches, no indicators, no dials. It was built to do a certain job, and as soon as it was completed it began working. When the job was done

it quit. It was the kind of machine whose perfection ruined the brain's civilization, and has undoubtedly ruined others, and will most certainly ruin more.

On the surface of the table appeared a shadow. Cell by cell appeared, as the carbon-magnesium-calcium mixtures were co-ordinated and projected by the machine. A human skeleton was almost suddenly complete—that is, an almost human skeleton. The brain was impatient with unnecessary detail, and if there were fewer vertebrae and more but finer ribs, and later, a lack of appendix, tonsils, sinal cavities, and *abductors minimi digit,* then it was only in the interest of logic. The flesh formed over the skeleton, fiber by perfect fiber. Blood vessels were flat, their insides sealed to each other until the body was complete enough to start distributing blood. The thing was "born" with a full stomach; it began its functions long before it was complete enough for the brain's entry.

While it was forming, the brain lay in a corner of the room reasoning it out. He knew its construction and had carried it out. Now he asked the reasons for its being this way, and calculated its functions. Hearing, sight with light, communication by vibrating tissues, degree of telepathy, organs of balance, possible and probable mental and physical reflexes, all such elementary things were carefully reasoned out and recorded on that fathomless brain. It was not necessary to examine the body itself or to look at it. He had planned it and it would be as he had planned. If he wished to study any part of it before it formed, he had his memory.

The body lay complete eventually. It was a young and strong and noble creature. It lay there breathing deeply and slowly, and under its broad, intellectual forehead its eyes glowed with the pale light of idiocy. The heart beat firmly, and a tiny twitch in the left thigh developed and disappeared as the cells adjusted themselves to each other. The hair was glossy and black, and was in a pronounced widow's peak. The hairline was the line separating the two parts of the head; for the top part was a hinged lid which now gaped open. The white matter of the brain was formed completely and relaid to make room for the metal-incased creator.

He drifted up to the head of the table and settled into the open skull. A moment and then it snapped shut. The young man—for such he was now—lay quiet for a long while, as the brain checked the various senses—temperature, pressure, balance and sight. Slowly the right arm raised and lowered, and then the left, and then the legs rose together and swung over the edge of the table and the young man sat up. He shook his head and gazed about with his rapidly clearing eyes, turned his head stiffly, and got to his feet. His knees buckled slightly; he grasped the table spasmodically, not bending his fingers because he hadn't thought of it yet. His mouth opened and closed, and he ran his tongue over the inside of his mouth and lips and teeth.

"What an awkward way to get around," he thought, trying his weight on one leg and then the other. He flexed his arms and hands and hopped up and down cautiously.

"Agh!" he said waveringly. "A-a-a-gh-ha-agh!" He listened to himself, enchanted by this new way of expressing himself. "Ka. Pa. Ta. Sa. Ha. Ga. La. Ra," he said, testing the possibilities of linguals, gutturals, sibilants, palatals, labials, single and in combina-

tion. "Ho-o-o-o-owe-e-e-e!" he howled, trying sustained tones from low to high pitch.

He tottered to the wall, and with one hand on it began padding up and down the room. Soon the support was no longer necessary, and he walked alone; and then he went faster and faster, and ran round and round, hooting strangely. He was a little disgusted to find that violent activity made his heart beat fast and his breathing harder. Flimsy things, these bipeds. He sat panting on the table and began testing his senses of taste and touch, his muscular and oral and aural and visual memories.

CHAUNCEY THOMAS was an aristocrat. No one had ever seen him in patchy pants or broken shoes. They would, though, he reflected bitterly, if he didn't get a chance to steal some soon. "What de hell," he muttered. "All I ast is t'ree meals a day and good clo'es, an' a house an' stuff, an' no work to do. Heh! An' dey tell me I can get t'ings by workin'. It ain't worth it. It just ain't worth it!"

He had every right to be bitter, he thought. Not only do they throw him down three flights of stairs in the town's most exclusive apartment house just because he was sleeping on the landing, but they stick him in jail for it. Did he get a chance to rest in jail? He did not. They made him work. They made him whitewash cells. That was hardly right. Then they give him the bum's rush out of town. It was unfair. What if it was the ninth time they had booked him? "I got to find me another town," he decided. He was thinking of the sheriff's remark that next time he was run in the sheriff would pin a murder on him if he had to kill one of his deputies to do it.

Chauncey turned his slow, unwilling feet onto the Springfield Turnpike and headed away from town. The night was two hours old and very warm. Chauncey slouched along with his hands in his pockets feeling misunderstood. A slight movement in the shadows beside the road escaped his attention, and he never realized that anyone was there until he found himself picked up by the slack of his trousers and dangling uncomfortably from a mighty fist.

"I ain't done nothin'!" he squalled immediately, resorting to a conversational reflex of his. "Le's talk this over, now, bud. Aw, come on, now; you got nothin' on me. You—*awk!*"

Chauncey's mouthings became wordless when he had managed, by twisting around in his oversize clothes, to see his captor. The vision of a muscular giant, at least six feet five, regarding him out of fathomless, shadowy eyes as he held him at arm's length was too much for Chauncey Thomas. He broke down and wailed.

The naked Apollo spun the bum about in midair and caught him by the belt. He plucked curiously at the worn jacket, reached down and tore a piece of leather out of the side of an outsize sport shoe as if it had been made of blotting paper, studied it carefully, tossed it aside.

"Lemme go!" shrieked Chauncey. "Gee, boss, I wasn't doin' nothin', honest I wasn't. I'm goin' to Springfield. I'll get a job or somethin', boss!" The words burned his mouth as he said them, but this was an emergency, and he had to say something.

"Gha!" grunted the giant, and dropped him on his ear in the middle of the road.

Chauncey scrambled to his feet and scuttled off down the road. The giant stood watching him as he slowed, made

a U turn and came running back under the influence of a powerful hypnotic suggestion emanating from that great clean body. He stood awed and trembling before the newborn one, wishing he were dead, wishing he were away from there —even in jail.

"Wh-who are you?" he faltered.

The other caught Chauncey's shifty eyes in his own deep gaze. The hobo's shaken mind was soothed; he blinked twice and sank down on his knees beside the road, staring upward into the inscrutable face of this frightening, fascinating man. Something seemed to be crawling into Chauncey's mind, creeping about there. It was horrifying, and yet it wasn't unpleasant. He felt himself being drawn out; his memories examined; his knowledge of human society and human customs and traditions and history. Things he thought he had forgotten and wanted to forget popped up, and he felt them being mulled over. Within a few minutes the giant had as complete a knowledge of human conduct and speech as Chauncey Thomas had ever had.

He stepped back, and Chauncey slumped gasping to the ground. He felt depleted.

"Get up, bum," said the big man in Chauncey's own idiom.

Chauncey got up; there was no mistaking the command in that resonant voice. He cringed before him and whined:

"Whatcha gonna do wit' me, boss? I ain't—"

"Shut up!" said the other. "I ain't gonna hurt you."

Chauncey looked at the immobile face. "Well . . . I . . . I guess I'll be on my way."

"Aw, stick around. Whatcha scared of?"

"Well . . . nothin' . . . but, who are you, anyway?"

"I'm Elron," said the giant, using the first euphonius syllables that came to mind.

"Oh. Where's yer clo'es? You been rolled?"

"Naw. Well, yeah. Wait here for me; I think I can—"

Elron bounded over the hedge, not wanting to astound the little tramp too much. From Chauncey's mind he had stolen a mental photograph of what Chauncey considered a beautiful outfit. It was a plaid suit with a diamond-check vest and yellow shoes; a wing collar and a ten-gallon hat. Slipping into his underground laboratory, Elron threw back the casing of the complex projector that had built him his body and made a few swift adjustments. A moment later he joined Chauncey, fully clad in Chauncey's own spectacular idea of tailoring to taste.

"Hully gee!" breathed Chauncey.

THEY WALKED along the road together, Chauncey quite speechless, Elron pensive. A few cars passed them; Chauncey automatically and without hope flung a practiced thumb toward each. They were both surprised when a lavish roadster ground to a stop ahead of them. The door was flung open; Chauncey slid in front of Elron and would have climbed in but for Elron's grasping him by the scruff of the neck and hauling him back.

"In the rumble, lug," he ground out.

"Nuttin' good ever happens t' me," muttered Chauncey as he followed orders. He had seen the driver. She was lovely.

"Where are you bound?" she asked as Elron closed the door.

"Springfield," he said, remembering

that the town was on this road from something Chauncey had said. He looked at this newest acquaintance. She was as tiny and perfect as he was big and perfect, and she handled the car with real artistry. Her eyes were deep auburn to match her hair. Judging her by human standards, Elron thought her very pleasing to look upon.

"I'll take you there," she said.

"T'anks, lady."

She looked at him quickly.

"What's up, babe?" he asked.

"Oh—nothing. Don't call me 'babe'."

"O. K., O. K."

Again she flashed him a look. "Are you—kidding me?" she asked.

"What about?"

"You look—oh, I don't know."

"Spill it, sister."

"Oh, sort of—well, not like the kind who calls girls 'babe.'"

"Oh," he said. "You mean—you'd say it different, like." He was having trouble with Chauncey's limited vocabulary.

"Something like that. What are you going to do in Springfield?"

"Just look around a little, I guess. I want to see a city."

"Don't tell me you never saw a city!"

"Listen," he snapped, covering up his error by falling back on one of Chauncey's devices, "it ain't worryin' you any, is it? What do you care?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said acidly. He sensed something strained about the silence that followed.

"Mad, huh?"

She looked at him scornfully and sniffed.

The trivial impasse intrigued him. "Stop here," he ordered her.

"What?" she asked furiously.

He leaned forward and caught her eye. *"Stop here!"*

She cut the ignition and the big car slid to a stop. Elron took her shoulder and turned her to him. She almost struggled, but hadn't time.

Tendrils of thought stole into her brain, explored her memories, her tastes, her opinions and philosophies and vocabulary. He learned why it was déclassé to address a woman as "babe," and that among civilized people ten-gallon hats were not worn with wing collars. He liked the language she used a little better than Chauncey's harsh inadequacies. He learned what music was, and a great deal about money, which, strangely enough, was something that almost never crossed Chauncey's mind. He learned something of the girl herself; her name was Ariadne Drew, she had a great deal of wealth she had not earned, and she was so used to being treated according to her station in life that she was careless about such things as picking up hitch-hikers on the road.

He let her go, snatching the memory of the incident from its place in her mind, so that she started the car and drove off.

"Now what on earth did I stop for?"

"So I could check up on that rear tire," he ad-libbed. He thought back about the things he had discovered that might interest her. Clothes was a big item.

"I must apologize," he said to her, word for word in her own vernacular, "for this hat. It's just too, too revolting. I saw a cute little number the other day in a shoppe on the avenue, and I mean to get it. My dear, I *mean!*"

She glanced, aghast, at his noble profile and bulging shoulders. He chatted on.

"I saw Suzy Greenford the other day.

You know Suzy. Oh, she didn't see *me!* I took care of that! And do you know who she was *with?* That horrible Jenkins person!"

"Who *are* you?" she asked him.

"I hear that Suzy is— What? Who am I? Oh, just one of the boys, darling. Now, where was I? Oh, yes; about Suzy. You've probably heard this awful gossip before"—she had!—"so stop me if you have. But she told her husband—"

"This is as far as I go," snapped the girl, wheeling the car over to the curb.

"Well, I—" Elron sensed that the right thing to do would be to get out of the car. He opened the door and turned to her.

"Thank you for the lift, darling. Let me know if I can do the same for you sometime." He stepped up onto the walk and she slammed the door and rolled the window open.

"You've forgotten to polish your fingernails," she said nastily, and slammed the car into gear.

"Now what the hell did you do?" asked a voice at his side. Chauncey was looking longingly after the roadster.

"Don't swear," said Elron. "It's vulgar. You are very crude, Chauncey. I don't want to have you around. Good-by, darling." Could Elron help it if Ariadne Drew called everybody "darling"?

The little bum stood open-mouthed, staring after the Greek god in his noisy plaid suit, and then followed slowly. "Dat mug'll bear watchin'!" he muttered. "Hully gee!"

Elron, with his new-found knowledge of human affairs, had little trouble securing a few dollars from a man he passed on the street—all he had to do was to demand it—and getting a hotel room for his body. From Ariadne's mind he had found out what handwriting was, and he signed the register and paid for a room without a hitch. Once his body was parked conventionally in bed, he popped the head open and slipped out. He felt that the body would relax a little better without him.

He drifted out of the window and hung for a while high above the town, searching for a familiar vibration—the impulses of Ariadne's mind. Freed from the cumbersome human body, Elron was far more sensitive to such things. He wanted to observe Ariadne now because he wanted to check up on his performance.

He caught it soon. It was to him as a gentle perfume is to us. He whisked over to the outskirts of the city and settled down toward a massive red brick pile surrounded by lovely landscaping. He circled it twice, finding her exact place in the house, and then dropped down the chimney. He hovered just above the artificial logs in the fireplace and began his eavesdropping.

Ariadne was sitting in her extravagant living room, chatting with—of all people—the redoubtable Suzy Greenford. Suzy was a small-souled, graceless girl with the ability to draw a remark out of any given acquaintance, and by ardent agreement, she could cull enough back-biting comment to keep her busy for weeks. She looked like a buck-toothed sparrow, dressed like a sweepstakes winner from Dubuque, and had a personality as soothing as the seven-year itch.

"Well, what have you *heard* today?" she asked expectantly.

Ariadne was gazing into far distances, and she only smiled. "Oh, Ari," said Suzy, "come on! I know something must have happened today from the way

you're acting. Please; you never tell me *anything!*"

Ariadne, being a woman, ignored this untruth and would have changed the subject had not Elron, in the chimney, gently stroked certain of her brain convolutions with his intangible tentacles. She started up suddenly, turned to Suzy. Elron could have had her reaction directly, but he was interested in the way she would express it to another, and in the way the other would receive it.

"If you must know," said Ariadne, "I met someone today. A man." She sighed. Suzy leaned forward happily. When she was not all mouth she was all ears.

"Where?"

"Picked him up on the road. Sue, you never saw such a pair as those two. They looked like a couple of comedians. One was a tramp—at first I thought they both were. The little one got into the rumble and the nice handsome one rode in front."

"Handsome?"

"Darling, you don't *know!* I've never seen—"

"But you said they were comic!"

"*Looked* comic, dear." In the fireplace, the golden-armored brain gave the equivalent of a nod and sent a thought current out to Ariadne. As if answering a question, she said:

"He would have looked *so* nice in a soft gray suit and a Homburg. And—I don't know what he is, but I think he should be an adventurer. A sort of poet-writer-adventurer."

"But what *was* he?"

Ariadne suddenly felt it possible to speak of other things. She got Suzy started on the peccadilloes of her long-suffering spouse and soon had completely eclipsed all thought of her volatile mystery man. Elron was gone.

Back at the hotel, the ovoid hovered over his sleeping body and thought bitter thoughts. He was ashamed of himself for underestimating the subtle nuances of human behaviorism. He had succeeded in making something ridiculous out of this biped he had created, and the fact annoyed him. There was a challenge in it; Elron could control powers that would easily disintegrate this whole tiny galaxy and spread its dust through seven dimensions, if he so wished it; and yet he was most certainly being made a fool of by a woman. It occurred to him that in all the universes there was nothing quite as devious and demanding as a woman's mind. It likewise occurred to him that a woman is easy to control as long as she always has her way. He was determined to see how closely a man could resemble a woman's ideal and still exist; and he was going to do it with this man he had made himself responsible for.

It was a long and eventful three months before Ari Drew saw Elron again. He went away, in his ten-gallon hat and his blatant plaids and his yellow shoes; and he took away with him his conversational variants and Chauncey the bum. He went to the greatest city of them all, and sought out people who knew about the things that he must be to achieve the phenomenal status of a man good enough for Ariadne.

He found it a fascinating game. In the corridors of universities, in prize-fight training camps, in girls' schools and kindergartens and gin mills and honkatonks and factories, he cornered people, spoke with them, strained and drained and absorbed what their minds

held. Sorting and blending, he built himself an intellect, the kind of mentality that awed lightweights like Suzy Greenford spell Intellect with a capital I. Instead of trying to suit each man's speech by using each man's speech, he developed a slightly accented idiom of his own, something personal and highly original. He gave himself an earthly past, from a neatly photostated birth certificate to gilt-edged rent receipts. He sounded out the minds of editors and publishers, and through the welter of odd tastes and chaotic ideology therein, he extracted sound and workable ideas on what work was needed. He actually sold poetry.

While his body slept in luxury, his mind hurtled over the earth, carried by its illimitably powerful golden shell. Elron could lecture a New York audience on the interesting people he had met in Melbourne, Australia, and the next day produce a cablegram from one or two of those people whom he had visited during the night. Scattered all over the earth were individuals who believed they had known this phenomenal young man for years.

It was at one of those pale-pink and puffy poetry teas that Ariadne saw Elron again. Suzy gave the tea as a current-celebrity show. Ari came gracefully late, looking lovely in something powder-blue, chastely sophisticated. Elron was scheduled to speak—something about "Metempsychosis and Modern Life." Ari was scheduled to sing. But she—

He was watching for her. He was dressed in soft gray, and the Homburg awaited him by the door. Her entrance was as ever in the grand manner, and all realized it; but for her it was that breath-catching experience of realizing that she was putting on the show for just one person in all that crowded room. She'd heard of him, of course. He was the "rage," which is a term used in polite society to describe current successes. Would-be's and has-beens are known as outrages.

But she had never seen him, that she remembered. He rose and stood over her and smiled, and he wordlessly took her arm, bowed at the hostess, and led her out. Just like that. Poor Suzy. Her protruding teeth barely hid the tiny line of foam that formed on her lips.

"Well!" Ariadne said as they reached the street. "That was a terrible thing to do!"

"Tsk, tsk!" he said, and helped her into his new sixteen-cylinder puddle jumper. "I imagine Suzy will get over it. Think of all the people she'll be able to tell!"

Ari laughed a little, looking at him strangely. "Mr. Elron; you're not . . . not the same man that—"

"That you picked up on the pike three months ago, dressed like a comedian?"

She blushed.

"Yes, I'm the man."

"I was . . . rude when I left you."

"You had a right to be, Ariadne."

"What happened to that hideous little tramp you were traveling with?"

"Chauncey!" Elron bellowed, and the trimly uniformed chauffeur swiveled around and nodded and smiled.

"Good heavens!" said Ariadne.

"He doesn't offend any more with his atrocious diction," said Elron precisely. "I found it possible to change his attitude toward work, but to change his diction was beyond even me. He no longer speaks."

She looked at him for quite a while as the huge car rolled out into the coun-

try. "You're everything I thought you might possibly be," she breathed.

He knew that.

THAT was their first evening together. There were many others, and Elron conducted himself perfectly, as befitted a brilliant and urbane biped. Catering to every wish and whim of Ari's amused him, for she was as moody as a beautiful woman can be, and he delighted in predicting and anticipating her moods. He adjusted himself to her hour by hour, day by day. He was ideal. He was perfect.

So—she got bored. He adjusted himself to that, too, and she was furious. If she didn't care, neither did he. Bad tactics, and something that supercosmic forces could do nothing about.

Oh, he tried; yes, indeed. He questioned her and he psychoanalyzed her and he even killed off all the streptococcus in her blood stream to see if that was the trouble. But all he got was a passive resentment of her. Half as old as time itself, he knew something of patience; but his patience began to give way under the pressure applied by this very human woman.

And, of course, there was a showdown. It was one afternoon at her home, and it was highly spectacular. He could read her mind with ease, but he could know only what thoughts she had formed. She knew he annoyed her. She also knew she liked him immensely; and for that reason she made no attempt to analyze her hostility toward him, and therefore he was helpless, tangled in her tenuous resentment.

It started with a very little thing—he came into the room and she stood at the window with her back to him and would not turn around. She did not speak or act coldly toward him, but simply would not face him. A very petty thing. After ten minutes of that he strode across the room and spun her around. She caught her heel in the rug, lost her footing, fell against the mantel and stretched becomingly unconscious on the floor in a welter of broken gewgaws. Elron stood a moment feeling foolish, and then lifted her in his arms. Before he could set her down she had twined her arms around his neck and was kissing him passionately. Poor, magnificent thing, he didn't know what to do.

"Oh, Elron," she blubbered. "You brute! You struck me. Oh, darling! I love you so! I never thought you would do it!"

A great light of understanding burst for Elron. *That* was the basic secret of this thing called woman! She could not love him when he acted in a perfectly rational way. She could not love him when he was what she thought was ideal. But when he did something "brutish"—a word synonymous with "unintelligent"—she loved him. He looked down at her beautiful lips and her beautiful black eye, and he laughed and kissed her and then set her down gently.

"Be back in a couple of days, darling," he said, and strode out, ignoring her cries.

HE KNEW what to do now. He was grateful to her for amusing him for a while and for teaching him something new. But he could not afford to upset himself by associating with her any longer. To keep her happy he would have to act unintelligent periodically; and that was one thing he could not stand. He went away. He got into his huge automobile and drove away down the turnpike.

"It's a pity that I'm not a man," he reflected as he drove. "I'd really like to be, but— Oh, I can't be bothered keeping track of anything as complicated as Ariadne!"

He pulled up at the outskirts of a small town and found his laboratory. Once inside, he lay down on the table, popped open his skull and emerged. Going to the machine in the corner, he added and took away and changed and tinkered, and the glow began to form again around the still body. Something was happening inside the skull. Something took shape inside, and as it happened, the skull slowly closed. In three hours, Elron, the man, climbed off the table and stood looking about him. The golden egg flew up to his shoulder and nestled there.

"Thank you for this . . . this consciousness," said Elron.

"Oh, that's all right," replied the ovoid telepathically. "You've had it for some months, anyway. Only I've just given you what you needed to appreciate it with."

"What am I to do?" asked the man.

"Go back to Ariadne. Carry on from where I left off. You can—you're a man, perfect in every cell and gland and tissue."

"Thank you for that. I have wanted her, but was never directed—"

"Never mind that. Marry her and make her happy. Never tell her about me—you have history enough to carry you through your lifetime, and brains enough, now, to do the work you have been doing. Ari's been good to me; I owe her this much."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. Just one thing; but burn this in your brain in letters of fire: A woman can't possibly love a man unless he's part dope. Be a little stupid all the time and very stupid once in a while. But *don't* be perfect!"

"O. K. So long."

"Be happy . . . er . . . son—"

Elron the man left the laboratory and went out into the sunlight. The golden egg settled to the floor and lay there an hour or so. He laughed once within himself and said, "Too perfect!"

Then he felt terribly, terribly lonely.

THE END.

★ ★

Watch—

for that new, large-sized

UNKNOWN WORLDS

★ ★

The Moving Finger Writes,

---AND HAVING WRIT---

Waldo sort of forgot whether he'd put the "Hunter" before or after "Waldo" and we forgot to check. Hence the discrepancy of name on "The Ultimate Egoist" and "Nightmare Island."

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Having donned the red wig and false mustache with which Reader Joseph Gilbert credits me in "—And Having Writ—" of the June issue, I sit me down to make repartee.

Be it understood that the red wig and false mustache are hardly necessary to my output. I didn't use them to write the story which evoked the paen-ful letter. But the reader is the ultimate boss of even the ultimate egoist; if Mr. Gilbert prefers me hidden behind such hirsute flash-patterns, then behind them I bow.

The aforesaid Mr. Gilbert has been more than kind. His kindness transcends even his suspicious nature. Seldom have I been more gratified than I was when I blushingly read his song of praise. My most sincere thanks cannot begin to deal with the situation. As for his suspicion, it will no doubt surprise a great many people, besides Mr. Gilbert to learn that I was christened Edward Waldo, and that Hunter is my grandmother's maiden name. Of course, I was only a kid at the time. And "The Ultimate Egoist" was indeed the first story ever to appear under that name. As for Mr. Gilbert's highly complimentary grouping of it with Sturgeon and the truly great Hubbard, I must say that the gentleman has shown remarkable discernment. "The Ultimate Egoist" was written quite consciously in Sturgeon's style and inspired by a line in Lafayette's "The Indigestible Triton," in which the hero, finding himself able to breathe under water, wonders if he himself is a figment of his own imagination. So please, Mr. Gilbert, call me a parallelist rather than a schizoid! And if, perchance, you notice any discrepancy in the by-lines of my stuff, remember that sulphur dioxide is the same thing as dioxide of sulphur. And many, many thanks. —E. Hunter Waldo Hunter.

Sir, you exaggerate!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

If some of the boys have been spouting nonsense about fantasy fiction being "escape literature," they can take a quick look at the June issue and forget it. What a jolly little collection of divers dooms and horrors! It's the sort of literature one feels

an irresistible urge to escape *from*, and, since it is difficult to escape from ideas that have been introduced into one's mind, I commence for the first time to understand why Unknown is now bimonthly.

Consider those eight stories you gave us. We learn in "The Fountain" the horror futility of searching for vanished youth. If this knowledge would lead us to drink, we are promptly deterred by a perusal of "Nightmare Island." Malcolm Jameson's pleasant suggestion that our "own unprompted minds" are apt to do a snazzy job of concocting private hells for ourselves, given half a chance, is nicely calculated to add to the gaiety. If the mood resulting from morbid contemplation of that story should lead us to a little spot of murder by way of divertisement, we are unfairly deterred by the gloomy conclusions to be drawn from "The Crest of the Wave." And if, as Leiber indicates, not only human ghosts, but also the shades of dogs, return to further the removal of an unfortunate murderer, the whole business becomes depressingly complicated. Under these circumstances, Sturgeon's pointless bit on the yesterdayness of Monday—pointless because, since Unknown came out on Friday, yesterday was Thursday, or Wednesday at the very least!—is almost a relief. Buck's suggestion that the consequences of being able to control the weather are apt to be a bit extreme is not exactly a help, and at this point "Shape of Desire" administers the final lethal dose, for we discover that the sudden materialization of what we most desire would be merely a simple and effective cause of ruin. Why, even that girl I dreamed about last night—!!!

Picture to yourself, O Olympean Editor, the utter desolation which reading such an issue is bound to create in the human spirit. Quail at the thought of the unbearable woe inflicted upon uncounted readers. But at least you need not worry about me. After finishing the issue, I made a quick dive for my Dante and, after reading a couple of cantos, felt a lot better.—Louis Russell Chauvenet, Esmont, Virginia.

Like bitters in a good drink, Unknown puts a bit more kick in living.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Some of my friends wonder, audibly, why I read Unknown. They claim I fill my mind with numerous details that are not true and leave no room for many facts that might help me in my uncertain maneuverings through life. They say I read trash and might well use the time for some useful and profitable employment. I don't answer them by saying, "What, for instance?"

Perhaps I do neglect reality for a world of illusion, neglect science and that highly valued virtue "common sense" for fantasy and fairy tales. And, yet, I do not feel injured by it.

Even so, the world I live in is much more interesting—if much more dangerous and frightening—than the world of the prosaic perambulating dictionaries. I am never alone when every other human has left the house. I do not tell myself that those creakings are made by mire or the boards of the old frame house giving in the wind. I *hope* the sounds, the squeakings, the rustlings, and the dull, muffled thuds are normal—made by the wind or loosened boards, but I am never quite sure.

In the sound of the wind, who can say what calls? A werewolf, perhaps, or a witch's black cat?

It is hard for me to enter a room that is dark. I am never quite certain the room will be empty when I turn on the lights. Mine is the nature that peers under beds, in closets, then turns around quickly—oh, quickly!—to see what has lurked behind me, grinning the while.

Now sensible folk laugh and say I am silly. They leave doors unlocked when the night is dark and never think of things that might enter. They lie asleep with their faces uncovered and smiling up at the ceiling—smiling in their sleep, safe in the knowledge of a comfortable world bounded by fact.

They never gaze deep into fires, watching the creatures that dance and peer out with twinkling eyes. They are never afraid to walk in dark places, 'neath trees' twisting arms, when the moon is full.

They never feel fear when they step on a manhole or a trapdoor in the street, testing them first to thwart the malignant being who waits to trap the unwary.

They never feel eyes when they are all alone—eyes that bore into their backs with a questing, boring gaze. They never feel the surge of panicky fear—when a footstep sounds behind them in an empty house.

They live calmly, sanely, protected by published facts. They don't believe in witches, werewolves, nor fairies and gnomes

and trolls—nor Santa Claus. They smile superiorly when you mention ghosts.

But *I* do! I believe in them all and I enjoy it, too. My world isn't safe or calm—but it's exciting. And I believe in them most firmly just after reading Unknown.

I liked the latest Unknown so much that I fear I will have to buy another copy to put in my collection, as I have practically read this one to pieces.

The story by Williamson was superb—really excellent. The short stories did not measure up to its standard, but I enjoyed them even so.

I like the covers, the strait-laced, dignified covers of Unknown—but still I miss the caricatures by Cartier.

And now a word of dissension—a grumble, if you will. Why bi-monthly?—Mary Evelyn Rogers, 1509 Euclid Avenue, Lawton, Oklahoma.

Hm-m-m—but what was *in* the bottle?

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I know that it's part of Unknown's policy to present rather remarkable stories intersplashed here and there with just enough of what is known and undeniably true to give one the uncomfortable and sometimes slightly disturbing feeling that the rest might also be true. But, good heavens, Campbell—perhaps the rest *is* true!

This morning I'd just left the Broadcast Music offices at 580 Fifth Avenue where I'd dropped off my latest song, "Dusty Roads"—plug—and was about to take the subway home at Grand Central when I happened to remember T. Sturgeon's "Shottle Bop" in this month's issue of Unknown. As long as I was downtown anyway, I decided to hie myself over to Tenth Avenue, 20th and 21st streets which, incidentally, was the address Sturgeon gave as the location of the Shottle Bop.

I took the shuttle over to Times Square and then the downtown local to 23rd Street. Walking west a few blocks I came to Tenth Avenue and then turned south. At last—21st Street!

There was the row of stores all right, but they were in the process of being torn down by a wrecking agency. And all the show windows were boarded up with old broken doors and musty-smelling rotten planks. I was disappointed. Then, as I turned to go back up toward 21st Street, I noticed a little old man sitting on a small wooden box and whittling unhurriedly on a block of wood. I had an idea.

"Uh—I beg your pardon, but have you been living in this neighborhood very long?" I asked suddenly.

The little old man stopped his whittling and regarded me thoughtfully for a moment. Finally he nodded and resumed his work. I swallowed nervously.

"Uh—then perhaps you could tell me if there used to be a store around here called the Shottle Bop? They sold bottles—with things in them."

The old man smiled, somewhat sadly, it seemed, and stood up slowly. Picking up the box he had been sitting on, he opened the door behind him and went in. The door closed silently. An object on the dirty sidewalk caught my attention—the wood he had been carving.

"Just a minute!" I called, picking it up. It was an exquisitely carved little wooden bottle of a rather peculiar shape. Fascinated by the skilled craftsmanship, I hesitated a moment before knocking—and then froze to the spot. There was nothing before me but a dirty brick wall.

And so, with a shudder, another "jingle" was born:

A THOUGHT

If I could know the secret
  Of all eternity,
The laws behind this mighty Plan
  And not lose sanity—
If I could know the whole darn truth,
  The why and whence and how—
I still think I'd prefer to know
  The things I know right now.

—R. B. Kimball, 1430 Parkchester Rd., New York, N. Y.

Canada's banned many magazine imports to save U. S. foreign exchange.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

My letter dealing with Unknown's first year rated the caption, "Ah, yes, we passed a year." Well, you can put it down for this review as "Ah, yes, we surpassed a year." And how you did!

Well, I've drawn my chair up before the

fire, my trusty brier is filled and the twelve issues gleaming in burnished colors are before me. Oops! Did I say twelve? That was rather a fast one you pulled on us, Mr. Campbell, not telling us ahead of time that Unknown had gone bimonthly.

It seems to me that Unknown deals with four types of literature. For literature they are.

First—there is the straight adventure story in a fantastic setting as exemplified by Page's novels.

Second—there is the mythological story dealing with present-day or past heroes in one of these settings. De Camp's "Lest Darkness Fall" and "On the Knees of the Gods" are good examples of this.

Third—there is the humorous fantasy ably done up by the "Enchanted Week End."

And last but not least, we have that eerie, spine-chilling, blood-curdling type which makes us a little uncertain of the world in which we live. I refer to "Sinister Barrier" and its able followers.

You will notice I've picked stories from the first year. And now to find those four-star gems which fit into each classification.

Our four-star adventure-fantasy is—"The Wheels of If." I've got to hand it to de Camp for getting cockeyed settings and situations for his stories.

Our mythological gem rating four stars is—"The Reign of Wizardry." Williamson sure turns out a top-notch story in a new medium for him. Mythological stories have been a rarity since, and I for one would heartily welcome them. Hm-m-m. Lot of good that would do. We over here aren't to get any fiction magazines any more. Can't you do something about this, Mr. Campbell? Can't you publishers get together and find some solution, or is this beyond your ken?

Ah, but humor. How Unknown tops the field in that. You must have the hex on your rivals: I haven't seen a humor fantasy to touch Unknown's even with the greatest stretch of the imagination.

Here there are plenty of four-star charms. And starting with the first of the year, here they are: "Derm Fool"—A honey of a short.

"The Indigestible Triton"—Gr-r-r. Let me at that guy who said indigestible de-

Get this, men, if you have trouble
With tender skin and wiry stubble:
Those Thin Gillettes—four for a dime—
Give slick, clean shaves, save dough and time!
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scribed it aptly. Of all the hilarious stories I have read, this one is well at the top.

"The Gods Gil Made"—Nice rib-tickler. I didn't think Rocklynne had it in him.

"The Mislaid Charm"—The best one of the lot. How any writer could pen that many words on the antics of a charm and a man on a drunk! Hats off to the ultimate in humor fantasy. Let's see someone top this.

And now for the Unknowns; the incomprehensibles:

"The Black Farm" was a nice eerie bit of business.

"Fear"—I read the story twice, Mr. Campbell. Enough said.

"It"—Take your zombies and werewolves. For sheer terror and suspense "It" tops them by a mountain of stakes and silver bullets. How he fabricated that much terror from such a simple and plausible action is beyond me.

"Darker Than You Think"—Williamson again and better than before. While probably not eerie it did give one a few slight, discomforting thoughts. Maybe there are werewolves!

And now for some gems which border into two or three of those classifications. I just can't leave them out:

"All Roads" lead to Rome. A very quaint fantasy.

"Fruit of Knowledge"—Such an old, old theme, but, oh, the treatment. Say, is there a book around where I can learn more about Lilith. Merritt makes quite a mention of the name, too.

"Are you there"—I'm a sucker for those endings which knock you right out of your complacency.

"Threshold"—Another of those endings which gave me an inner rosy feeling.

And lastly "Shottle Bop"—Seems to me Sturgeon is going places in fantasy.

Covers now are more or less the same, but my preference runs to those two superb color combinations, namely the brown, white and black issue and that blue of blues for December. And February, winding up the year, is very nice in that olive-green layout.

The best issue, and it wasn't hard to decide either, was taken by February, 1941. You're really making each issue better than the last, Mr. Campbell. The verse in "Shottle Bop" was worth the price of a year's admission in itself. Very amusing. And so, until February, 1942, this is your Canadian correspondent signing off, that is if he is lucky enough to get those six precious issues.—Ronald Harmer, Hespeler Rd., Galt, Ontario, Canada.

EVEN THE ANGELS

by MALCOLM JAMESON

● Concerning the case of one Soul, accidentally and mistakenly consigned to Gehenna, and the interdepartmental troubles of straightening out the case. For the Soul wanted his rights—

Illustrated by Kramer

Mr. Herbert P. McQuigley died, was buried, and duly mourned. He was a good man, as men are judged in Pearlburg. He did not smoke, drink, dance, or play at cards. He married early, and he was the kind of man that did not take his marriage vows lightly. His private life, in short, was impeccable. His reputation for utter rectitude had never been clouded by the slightest breath of scandal except for one brief rumor that turned out later to be a base canard. At a time when Mr. McQuigley was attending a bankers' convention in Cin-

cinnati, the police happened to raid a gambling dive. Part of their haul chanced to be a man, quite drunk, who was clicking a stack of chips with one hand while his disengaged arm held a chorine he was dandling on his knee. The culprit gave his name as H. P. McQuigley of Pearlburg, and the thing got in the papers. But all that was straightened out and explained, and the appropriate apologies made public by the papers. The fellow happened to be a ne'er-do-well cousin, of the reprobate Orangetown branch.

So much for Mr. McQuigley's private life. He was a lawyer by profession, but eventually got into business where he was acclaimed to be a success. He became president of the local bank and acquired the town's leading mercantile establishment in addition to much good farmland. Disgruntled persons who had had business dealings with him often complained he was a hard bargainer and a merciless collector, but to those Mr. McQuigley always said—and the logic of it is indisputable—that since he never demanded more than was due, he should not be expected to concede less. To those who complained that the laws were unfair, he suggested they change the law. In politics he was a conservative.

But as previously stated, he died and was buried. His widow and the brethren of the First Orthodist Church, of which he was a deacon, gave him an imposing funeral. He was buried in a private burial ground and a modest stone placed to mark the spot. A few centuries rolled by, and in the course of them the headstone sagged and fell into the patch of weeds that had taken the plot. The world passed on, busy with its own affairs, not knowing or caring that once the McQuigley name was one to conjure with in Pearlburg. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

Not so, however, in Heaven. Or rather, in that sector of it given over to the Orthodists. Two hundred years, four months and five days after the demise of Mr. McQuigley, a routine report from the Heavenly Auditor to the Rectifier of Wrongs started a chain of activities whose reverberations continued to echo in the Hereafter for a long time to come. Perhaps as good a way as any to plot the course and expose the anatomy of that Celestial headache is to offer the Heavenly file, enriched by the interpolation of certain unofficial memoranda exchanged among the harassed angels and demons concerned.

The very first entry is the Auditor's report alluded to above. It is dated the 204th day of the year 88,011, absolute —which is meaningless to us. The report itself is self-explanatory, except that Mesram's use of the word "recently" will bear a little interpretation. He is no doubt alluding to the two-hundred-and-odd years that had intervened between the passing of Mr. McQuigley and his own entry into the case. It must be borne in mind that to an immortal such a period of time is not impressive. Here is the report:

From: The Heavenly Auditor
To: The Rectifier of Wrongs.
In Re: Satanic Complaint about Allotment.

Your Reverence:

Pursuant to your gracious instructions I have looked into His Malevolency's demand for a larger allotment for fuel and his request for additional appropriation for salaries and upkeep of one demon and three imps. I regret to state that for once His Devilship ap-

pears to have a well-grounded complaint. A comparison of the rosters of the Blest and the Damned with an actual head count on the job shows that there is one soul too many in the Pits of Gehenna, while the Celestial Chorus is shy one tenor.

A superficial investigation indicates that this unfortunate soul is one Herbert P. McQuigley, a devout Orthodist, recently admitted, known on the records as Inmate 1,218. He was received on the night of August 14, 1941; Gate Tender, Saleph, angel, second class; Deputy Recording Angel of the Watch, Mosoch; Sorter of the Sheep from the Goats, Riphath. The latter, acting on a transcript of the record furnished by Mosoch, sentenced McQuigley to an eternity in the Pits. Curiously, the transcript upon which he acted has since disappeared. Sorter Riphath, when interviewed, said that to the best of his recollection the alleged sins were gambling, drunkenness and lascivious conduct. These sins do not appear in the official record.

A miscarriage of justice may have occurred. I recommend a searching inquiry into the whole matter of McQuigleg's entry and commitment. But may I suggest to Your Reverence that it is high time someone put a bug in Satan's ear? He is no doubt a good angel for his job, but it seems to me he lies awake nights thinking up ways to worry and embarrass us here in Heaven. After all, *we* aren't damned.

Yours faithfully,
Mesram

From: Rectifier of Wrongs,
To: The Heavenly Auditor.
In Re: Your Report.

Submissive Sir:

Your report received and will be acted upon.

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The last four lines of your report are rejected and you are hereby rebuked for having written them. When your opinion is desired on such matters, it will be asked for. *Abimael.*

Unofficial scribble to First Deputy Recording Angel, attributed to Judith, private secretary to Abimael.

"Stand by, sanctikins, to go through the wringer. It's about that McQuigley mixup. Somebody's going to sizzle for it. Satan squawked and old nosy Mesram has been poking around. So far he's pinned it on Riphath, but you can bet your last bowl of ambrosia that that holy old coot isn't going to accept the buck. You'd better tip Thiras off so he can be thinking up the answers—I just finished engrossing the official scroll. It'll hit you in a day or so. For ever and ever,

Judy.

From: Special Investigator Nahum,
To: The Rectifier of Wrongs.
In Re: Scandalous Laxity in Bureau of Records of the Living.

Your Reverence:

I have the honor to report that the Angel Riphath, though guilty as charged of having wrongfully committed Inmate 1,218 while sitting as Sorter of the Day, is completely exonerated. He had no choice but to proceed from the Divine Record, a presumably authentic copy of which was before him at the time.

The fault lies in the Recording Bureau, whence the false document emanated. After a very painful investigation the following facts have come to light:

On New Year's Eve of the first day of 88,000, absolute, they threw a party in the Recorder's office—much nectar and nec— Well, you know—the usual thing. Present were: First Dep-

uty Sarug and Judith, of the your own office, and a brace of Soothers of the Blest, and several minor deputies. Thiras, who was on watch at the time, joined them and lost contact with his watchees for the space of several hours. To cover up, he later used the current Earthly AP dispatches as a source of recordable sins, on the theory that only stuff that gets into the papers is serious enough to be worth writing down anyhow. In the interim a report had come through to the effect that H. P. McQuigley—Inmate 1,218—had been arrested in Cincinnati on various charges and that his guilt was apparent, which Phiras inscribed on the blotter.

Somewhat later a correction came through and was duly made, but it was delayed somehow and in the meantime the said McQuigley had died, been received and committed, leading to the unhappy dilemma we have now to face. It scared Sarug and Thiras. They rectified the records, but there was no way to undo the commitment without exposing themselves, so they entered into a conspiracy to forget the whole thing, trusting no one would pay attention to McQuigley's wails that it was all a mistake.

These are the facts. I have no recommendations to make.

Nahum.

From: The Rectifier of Wrongs,
To: Sarug, Thiras, Judith.
In Re: Your Misconduct.

Children:

Report to me at once for assignment of penance.

From: The Rectifier of Wrongs,
To: The Archangel Asarmoth, Chief of Legal Department.
In Re: Erroneous Commitment.

Your Holiness:

Please advise me how to rectify the foregoing error. *Abimael.*

Unofficial note, Asarmoth to Abimael.

You can't. Best thing to do is forget it. What is one damned, more or less, among the Orthodists? I've never been able to figure out how any of 'em get by, their views are so strict. Anyway, what makes their Heaven any more desirable than their Hell? We only work here, you know, but we can't help having our personal opinions.

But seriously, old boy, you're up against something. The fellow has a legitimate kick, I suppose, but we can't back down on the doctrine of the infallibility of our courts. And you are perfectly aware of what we will be letting ourselves in for if we admit a single instance of error in the records. Every damned soul in Hell will be clamoring for a review. No, old-timer, it won't do. Why not send one of your slick-tongued persuaders down there and have a talk with him?

As for Satan, there is no pleasing him. I've never liked him, but then I am not omniscient. What's more to the point, I'm not omnipotent. You might hush him up by giving him what he asks for, but mind you, not an obulus more. He'll get the idea he has something on you, and then there *will* be Hell to pay! Excuse the pun, old fellow, but Heaven is a dull place at times.

Cordially, *Asarmoth.*

From: The Rectifier of Wrongs,
To: Special Investigator Nahum.
In Re: McQuigley.

Dear Servitor:

Go to Hell. In Pit 47 in Subdivision 3 of West Gehenna you will find

Inmate 1,218. Have him fished out and cooled off and have a talk with him. You know all the facts. Tell him as little as you have to—maybe the best thing to say is that we have arranged a pardon for him. In any case, give him a thorough brushing off and tell him we are transferring him to Heaven. That ought to do it. Let me know as early as possible how you make out.

Abimael.

Copy of requisition on Celestial Stores and Supplies, submitted by Rachel, secretary to Nahum.

"Please furnish at once:

Item 1. Two brand-new wings, size 38, style XIV-B. To replace former ones, badly singed and unfeathered by trip to Hell.

Item 2. Fresh head of hair, as per sample—only a couple of shades redder, and slightly more curly, if you don't mind. Same reason as above, except there was no defeathering.

Item 3. Complete new outfit of robes, as above.

P. S. If I've got to do this again, for Heaven's sake, furnish asbestos weave—especially the skirt. You should have seen those poor sinners writhe! It was too, too cruel.

From: Special Investigator Nahum,
To: The Rectifier of Wrongs,
In Re: McQuigley.

Your Reverence:

This McQuigley is a tough egg. He has the legal mind. To make a long story short, he won't play ball except on his own terms.

First off, he was stubborn and wouldn't get out of the pool. Said he'd stood it for two centuries and would stand it as many more. All he wanted was justice. That is, justice *and* retribution. He kept saying that over and over, and all the while he was splashing that damned vitriol all over us. Rachel was taking down the chatter, and it made her pretty sore. She was all burned up, and I'm not being funny about it, either.

But to get to the point. He claimed he had been framed and could prove it. Said he had been through the same thing on Earth and came out on top, and what's more, got big damages. Says he expects as much or more here. I promised him Heaven, but he said that was not enough. He rated Heaven. In addition, he wants to know, what does he get for two hundred years of torment in blazing brimstone and boiling vitriol? He was entitled to damages. What are we offering to keep him from blabbing to the Big Boss?

That smacks of blackmail, I know, but he is shrewd, and knows where he has got us. I pointed out that it was impossible to add anything to Heaven, since Heaven itself is the gratification of every proper human desire. He snorted at that; said he'd settle for an archangelship. I made the counteroffer of a demonship, but he said no. Archangelship or nothing. Well, that's out, I know. An archangel is allowed a few faults, but one thing he must have, and that is some understanding and sympathy for human beings. An Orthodist of his type has neither. What's more, he would start out with a grievance against all the Blest, because they had been there from the first, while he had just come from the Pit.

It looks bad. I borrowed a few yards of unused vitriol strainer and wrapped Rachel up in it and brought her home. Fortunately the parchment she used was acidproof, so the transcript of the inter-

view has been preserved. It is inclosed herewith. *Nahum.*

Unofficial, Asarmoth to Abimael.

Herewith the sequel. Read it and weep. Now what?

Unofficial: Asarmoth to Abimael.

Nahum did quite right. But send him back to talk some more. Keep on fishing for counterproposals. Sooner or later the bird will come across with one we can handle. It's likely to be a slick proposition, for McQuigley was a lawyer and a clever one. But then, I'm a lawyer, too. Let me worry about our angle.

From: Special Investigator Nahum,
To: The Rectifier of Wrongs.
In Re: The McQuigley case.

Your Reverence:

Things came out better this time. He refuses absolutely to accept a pardon for a sin he did not commit, but says he has no scruples against accepting one for a sin he *did* commit. It seems that the basic cause of his bellyache is that he has had to suffer for some alleged concentrated sinning that he didn't get any fun out of. I gather that he spent most of his life yearning to go on a big bust, get pie-eyed, watch the little ball fall, and the rest of it, but being a pillar of society in a hick town and getting rich at it, he didn't dare. Anyhow, what he wants now is to be permitted to go back to Earth for a week end with an understanding in advance that he can shoot the works and get away with it. Then he will come back to Heaven with no hard feelings. *Nahum.*

Unofficial, Abimael to Asarmoth.

I am afraid of this. It is revolutionary. But it may be an out. What do you think?

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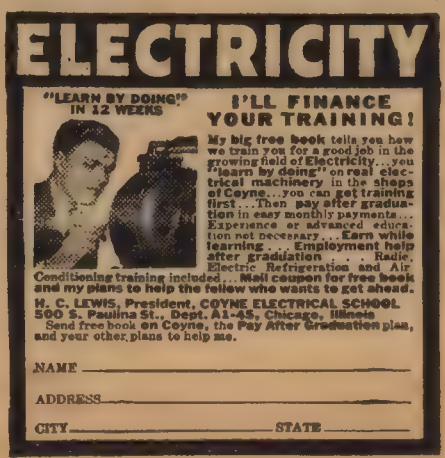
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Same: Asarmoth to Abimael.

It's worth a shot, but not via the pardon route. To get such a pardon we would have to go to the Big Boss. He must know, of course, since He knows everything, but since He chooses to pretend not to notice, it's a hint to us not to emphasize it. Suppose we do it by contract—I will draw up the contract—and sign it with him? We'll have lots of witnesses so he can't squirm out of it later.

By the way, it wouldn't do him any good to go back to Earth now. Things have changed. Better cut him back to his own time—say, swap his personality with that of the erring cousin who got him into this mess. That'll take a miracle, but I guess you can wangle that out of the Miracle Bureau without going higher. We don't want this small time chiseler's wails to make too much noise.

From: The Rectifier of Wrongs,
To: Chief of Bureau, Miracles and Apparitions.
In Re: Case of H. P. McQuigley—brief of transcript attached.

From the inclosure you will readily see the dilemma we are facing. Knowing nothing is impossible to you, I want to ask a favor. Will you—without making too much fuss about it—arrange to have this soul transferred back to 9:15 the night of Saturday, the 15th of June, 1940, and kept there until 3:22 the following Monday morning? House it in the body of his black sheep cousin Hank. I presume you can do the necessary juggling of the consciousnesses of the parties concerned so that the substitution will go unnoticed. *Abimael.*

Unofficial (very). From Miraclist's Helper Joel, to Nahum.

Your chief sure wished an assignment on us this time! Boy! You should

have seen that sainted hellion of yours perform. He did everything, and how! He lapped it up. He went at his sinning like an old-timer and added a few touches of his own. First he socked the roulette layout for a couple of grand, and then he shifted to stud. He played his cards like a fish, but he had 'em, so he mopped up. And drink—wow! I've heard of the unquenchable thirst of the Pit, but I never saw it in action before. He settled down to straight rum finally, and polished off two full bottles by dawn.

He slept awhile after that—who wouldn't—and then got up and tapered off on champagne. By midafternoon, when the chorines came in, he was in form again. He didn't miss any bets with them, either. That night they danced awhile and shot craps in the intermissions. He never let down a minute until the cops came in and the show was over.

Anyhow, your miracle is done, and I hope it helps. But for Pete's sake, what's it all about? How is a guy like that going to stand it in the Orthodist Heaven?

Canceled pass, lifted from hook in the gatekeeper's lodge, Southern Portal of the Pearly Gates:

Good for one exit from Hell and one re-entry to Heaven. Signed, Abimael; countersigned, Asarmoth. Taken up by Gatekeeper Ebal, 240th day, the year 88,011.

From: Satan,
To: The Rectifier of Wrongs.
In Re: Your pet, McQuigley.

Think you've pulled a fast one, don't you? Wait. That guy belongs in my joint, if I know anything about sinners. Anyhow, I'm keeping the fires going in his pit and his demon Meroz on the job, and if you know what's good for you, you'll pay the bills. Here's something else to put in your pipe—when you start raiding my place to populate yours, you're simply raising Hell! He! He! . . . . . *Beelzebub.*

From: Supervisor of Distribution of Blessings.
To: Rectifier of Wrongs.

Your Reverence:

My flock is turning sour and something's got to be done about it. A new saint hit here the other day, but there is something fishy about him. He has a low number, for one thing. Moreover, he grouses all the time, which no true saint ever does. He threw his first goblet of nectar in the cherub's face and howled because it didn't have kick enough to make a gnat grunt. And his manner with the lady saints is . . . well, uh . . . unsaintly. That's not all, he openly boasts of having sinned on Earth and says he is going to get away with it. The rest of my charges are deeply offended. Do you suppose a hatch was left open and the fellow crawled up from Downside? . . . . . *Shadrach.*

Unofficial, Abimael to Asarmoth.

Now look what you got me into. I'm sunk. What do we do next—build him a special private heaven? I'm afraid there will be riots both here and down there. One thing the Big Boss'll never stand for and that is discrimination. You said you'd do the worrying. Well, hop to it. I'm worried out.

Asarmoth to Abimael.

Ah, ye of little faith! Leave it to Uncle Dudley. How long since he came

back—five months, Earth time, isn't it? Send for a couple of Michael's strong-arm angels and have them give him the bum's rush. His old pit is warm and ready.

Abimael to Asarmoth.

He'll holler. Then we'll have an investigation.

Asarmoth to Abimael.

Let him holler. Tell him to file an appeal in your court. Then send for me.

Transcript of significant portions of hearing before Special Court of Rectification held in Gehenna, Justice Abimael sitting. Satan is present as an interested party. The demon Meroz is acting as sergeant at arms. Attorney General Asarmoth is acting for the authorities, the shade of Herbert P. McQuigley as his own counsel—at his own insistence. The Miraclist Joel has testified as to the sins committed. Satan, and various shades, both from the Pits and from among the Blest, have appeared as character witnesses. Their testimony is unanimous on one point. McQuigley is a typical nonrepentant sinner of the most arrogant variety. At last McQuigley takes the stand, Asarmoth questioning.

Q. You complain that you were tormented for the space of two hundred years and five months? And without justifiable reason?

A. I do. And fearfully. There was no justice in it. I should have spent that term in Heaven.

Q. Quite so. The court concedes it. Since then you have spent five months in Heaven?

A. Yes, after much—

Q. Never mind that. You admit it. Now, as a member in good standing of the Orthodist sect, what do you think is a fitting punishment for a man who gets beastly drunk and fritters away his substance in gaming?

A. Eternal damnation!

Q. Good. Yet you did that very thing?

A. Yes, all but the frittering part. (Witness smirks.) But I had in my pocket—

Q. We know what you had in your pocket. It was this. I show you a contract. Do you recognize it? Do you admit it to be your own free act, done without coercion or any promise given outside the terms set down and agreed upon in its text?

A. Sure. Why not? (Defiantly.)

Q. One more question and then we will examine the contract. Was it not a lifelong tenet of yours that one should be satisfied with the letter of a contract, neither demanding more nor accepting less?

A. Absolutely. It still is.

Asarmoth opens contract and reads.

Q. The essence of this agreement is in Stipulation III. I read:

"Having been unlawfully deprived of two hundred years and five months of Paradise and in lieu of it having been compelled to suffer a like period of the most bitter torment, the party of the second part—that is, McQuigley—contends that he is thereby entitled to whatever benefits that may have flowed from the alleged sins for which he was punished; and that in order to possess himself of those intangible benefits, it is necessary that he be released from Hell long enough to commit the sins from which they flow— Correct, Mr. McQuigley?

A. (Witness nods emphatically.) To the dot!

Q. (Continuing reading): "—and to achieve that end he voluntarily consents to accept that punishment appropriate to the deeds which he has already suffered, and further waives all right, title and interest in the two hundred years of bliss of which he has been defrauded, provided the party of the first part concurs. The party of the first part—The Heavenly Authorities—agree." Still correct, Mr. McQuigley?

A. (Smugly): What could be righter? The text is plain.

Q. Quite so. You came here an innocent man. Through a clerical error you wrongfully suffered a period of punishment—an extremely short period, I may say, in view of the extent of Eternity. As soon as the error was discovered you were offered any atonement within our power, but you rejected everything but this—your own idea. We have carried out the contract. You accepted the period of punishment and waived the two hundred years of bliss. The five-odd months of Paradise to which your original entry entitled you has been given you. The accounts are balanced, all terms fulfilled. There is nothing left to do but file this document among the archives.

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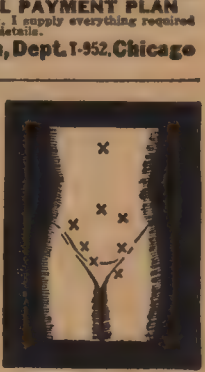

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Asarmoth, turning toward the bench: Your Reverence, the case is complete. The sinner's plea is frivolous. Let Meroz take him back to his pit.

McQuigley: Hey! You can't do that to me. What about the rest of it—what you promised? From now on—

Justice Abimael: You came here in the beginning as a flawless soul, so far as the record showed, meriting eternal bliss. There was an unfortunate error made, but it has since been compensated for on terms of your own dictation. Justice is satisfied. But in your second coming, you appear as a confessed and unregenerate sinner and thus merit a perpetuity of damnation. It is by your own act that—

McQuigley: B-but I understood . . . it was implied . . . that is, I . . . uh . . . thought that—

Justice Abimael, shaking his head wearily: Not in the contract! Meroz, take him away!

Most unofficial, from the Archangel Asab, Keeper of the Great Seal of All the Heavens and personal attendant on the All Highest.

To Asarmoth:

God's in his Heaven and all's right with the world. I heard the Big Boss chuckle last night—the first time in eons. You got away with it, kid, but for a while you were on awfully thin ice. Don't stick your neck out again!

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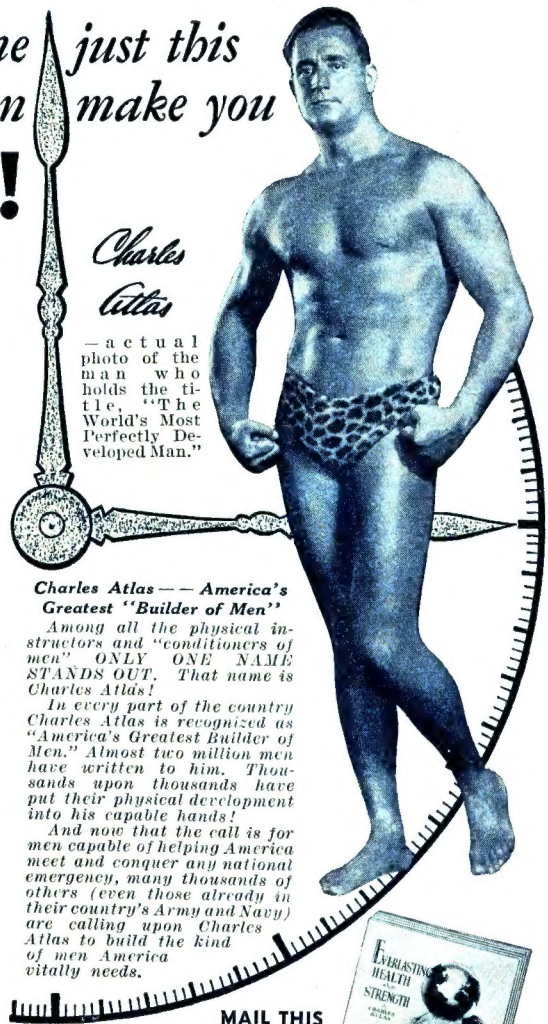

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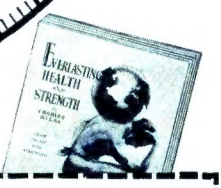

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